

## **A QUEER COURTSHIP.**

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BY T. C. RAYMOND.  
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It was a wild winter's night, and we, six in number, were seated around a genial bright fire in my uncle's cosy sitting-room. We had come from our homes to spend Christmas with him, and a merry time we had passed. Christmas had gone, and our visit had been protracted far beyond our original intentions.

Uncle Richard and his wife, Aunt Jenny, were great favorites with us. They had no children of their own, and were always glad to have any young people visit them, and happy enough were we to avail ourselves of the privilege.

On the night in question, after tea was finished, we were gathered in the sitting-room. Aunt Jenny was sitting by the table on which rested the lamp, sewing, and Uncle Richard was gazing abstractedly into the fire, and listening to the storm as it howled around the house, and shook it to its foundations.

"What a fearful night," said Aunt Jenny, after a long silence. "I was thinking just now how we should make it pleasant for you, my dears. What shall we do?"

"I have it," said I, quickly, "Uncle Richard shall tell us a story."

"A story," said my uncle, looking up from the fire, "I am afraid I shall have to refuse you, Nellie, I have no talent for story telling."

"We can't let you off," I exclaimed. "A story we must have, uncle. Tell us one of your own adventures. You know you have been a perfect Sinbad in adventures."

Uncle Richard scratched his head, and laughed.

"How would you like a love story?" he asked.

"The very thing. Let us have one, by all means," was the unanimous reply.

"Well, then," he said, with a comical glance at Aunt Jenny, "I'll tell you how I won my wife."

"Now, Richard—" began Aunt Jenny, blushing.

"Never mind, my dear," said my uncle, "it will interest them, and," he added, with a laugh, "it may give them some hints by which they may profit hereafter."

Uncle Richard stirred the fire, and then settling himself comfortably in his chair, told us his story.

"You must know, my dear children, that when I was a young man I was what is generally termed 'very fast.' I don't think I was as bad as many young men, or even as the majority of them; but nevertheless I was looked upon by good, steady people, as a dangerous companion for their sons. I was not long in acquiring this reputation, and it clung to me long after I deserved it. I began to mend my ways when I was about twenty-five, but I was more than thirty before I got credit for being a better man, and it was during this time that I first met your aunt. It was a case of love at first sight; something, by the way, of which you young ladies are fond of hearing, but which I am powerless to explain. It was real, honest, true love, though, and she was worthy of it."

Uncle Richard's eyes wandered over to where his wife was sitting, and meeting there an answering smile, wandered back to the fire, and he went on.

"We first met at a party, and after that very frequently. I determined to be a better man, and to fit myself for the new life to which I aspired. Jenny saw my efforts and encouraged them. Her father, however, did not believe in my good intentions, and when he found I wanted to marry his daughter, was very severe on me. I had a hard time with him before I was married, but after I became his son-in-law, I never had a better, truer friend. The old man is gone now, and I hope he is happy."

"The old gentleman had been a soldier in the war of 1812, and had carried his military discipline into his family, where he was very strict. He was, in addition to this, an elder in the Presbyterian church, and was not at all disposed to regard any shortcomings with leniency. One morning I was sitting in my office, getting ready to go into court, when in walked old Major Shorter."

"'Good morning, major,' said I, 'take a seat.'"

"He returned my greeting, and took the chair to which I pointed. He sat there for at least five minutes, regarding me with a fixedness that made me feel uncomfortable. When he had finished his inspection he placed his stick in front of him, and leaning his chin

on it, looked at me steadily, and said in an abrupt manner:

"Richard Sturgis, I have called this morning on a matter which is unpleasant to me, and which we had better settle at once. Tell me frankly what is your motive in visiting my daughter so frequently?"

"To be frank with you, Major Shorter," I replied, boldly, "I am very anxious to make her my wife."

"Humph!" muttered the old man, shortly, "I thought so. I suppose you intended to speak to me about this matter?"

"I did, sir, but not for some time yet."

"Well, then, you may save yourself any further trouble about it, for I'll give you my answer now. You can't have her."

"I rose to my feet in astonishment.

"I suspected your motives," continued Major Shorter, "and I thought it best to come here and let you understand the matter before it is too late. I love my daughter, Mr. Sturgis, and I have no idea of seeing her ruin her happiness by marrying a dissipated man."

"I assured him that I had abandoned my old habits and was leading a new life, but it was in vain; the old man would not believe me, and our interview ended in a quarrel and my being forbidden his house. I had certainly made a bad beginning, but I was by no means discouraged. I had not said anything to Jenny about the state of my feelings, and I determined to do so at once. I had an engagement to meet her at a friend's and accompany her home that evening. During the walk, I addressed her and was accepted. I told her all that had passed between her father and myself, and she, dear girl, was indignant at her father's course. It was plain that I could not visit her at home as usual, and we set to work to devise a plan for our future meetings. The major was a regular attendant upon the Wednesday night prayer meetings of his church, and was generally absent about two hours. Besides meeting at the houses of our friends, we agreed that I should visit her at home while her father was absent at prayer meeting.

"This plan worked admirably for a while, but, like everything human, broke down at last. One night Jenny and I were cosily chatting in the parlor, when we heard the rattle of a latch key in the front door. Jenny sprang up in alarm.

"There's papa," she exclaimed, "what shall we do? You can't get through the back way, and he is at the front door."

"My first impulse was to rush by the major, and upset him if he got in my way; but a moment's reflection convinced me that this would never do, and just then I heard the front door closed and locked. My resolution was taken in a moment.

"Open the parlor door," I said to Jenny, in a whisper, "and do nothing to arouse his suspicion."

"Jenny opened the door, and I placed myself behind it. As I did so, the major entered the room. I trembled in every joint; if he should shut the door I should be discovered. I had not thought of this when I selected my place of concealment.

"Shut the door, Jenny," said the major, as he came in.

"O no, papa," she exclaimed, hurriedly, "it's so warm in here that I want the air," and she pushed the door back so far that she nearly crushed me.

"Warm!" said the old man, sharply, "warm! You must be dreaming. It is freezing out of doors."

"I'm gone," I thought, and I prepared myself for a scuffle.

"However," said the major, "it may be warm here, for you have a terrible fire in that stove. You may leave the door open."

"A load was taken from my mind. The old man sat in the parlor for at least half an hour, and that time he devoted to abusing me, and telling Jenny about my impudence in wanting to marry her. Sometimes I was indignant at the injustice of his remarks, but as a general thing I could scarcely restrain my laughter. My position was a trying one. I was compelled to get up as close to the wall as possible, in order to avoid attracting the major's attention, and to breathe as lightly as I could. The cold draught which came in through the crack of the door produced a constant inclination to cough, and I was in mortal dread lest I should yield to it and betray myself. The half hour seemed to me like thirty years instead of so many minutes, and I was elated beyond description when I at last saw the old man get up and leave the room. As he went out he closed the door after him, and as we heard him ascending the stairs to his chamber, Jenny and I broke into a hearty laugh.

"You are safe for the present," she said, "but you must go away at once. It will not be prudent to let you out at the front door, as papa will hear us, so you must go out at the window."

"The window was raised softly, and giving

Jenny a kiss, I sprang out of it. I had scarcely touched the ground when I was seized by the collar, and a rough voice demanded to know why I had left the house in that way. Looking up I found myself in the hands of a watchman. While I was hesitating what to say, Jenny, who had heard the question, said to the watchman:

"It's all right, policeman; the front door-key has been misplaced, and the gentleman had to leave the house through the window."

"Who are you?" asked the watchman.

"I am Miss Shorter," she replied, "and the gentleman is Mr. Sturgis, a friend of my father."

"If you say so, miss, I suppose it's all right," said the watchman, releasing me, "but," he muttered, as he turned away, "it's very queer to do business in that style."

The next morning, before I left my office, I received a visit from Major Shorter. Declining my offer of a seat, the old man came up in front of my desk, and looking me straight in the face, said, sharply:

"Richard Sturgis, you were at my house last night. I'm sorry I did not know it, for I would have given you the punishment your impudence deserved."

"I began to explain the matter, but he cut me short."

"Never mind," he said, "it's over now, and it can't be helped. Don't try it again, for I warn you I shall be on the watch for you."

He turned abruptly and left me. I certainly felt rather sheepish, but I determined not to be outdone. I was determined to marry Jenny, and he was resolved that I should not, and from all appearances, the struggle bade fair to be a hard one.

For several days I did my best to get a message to Jenny, but failed. At last I hit upon a plan of communication. Major Shorter's house was built directly on the street, and as he had forbidden me to darken his doors, I resolved to make use of his windows, which, as somebody very justly remarks, 'are just as good as doors, provided they have no nails in them to tear your breeches.' On the next Sunday night I stationed myself in the shadow of the doorway of the church, and as Jenny came by, accompanied by her father, I managed to slip a note into her hand. In it I revealed my plan to her, and as she passed out of church, a bright look which she gave me signified her willingness to adopt it.

Every evening after this, at dusk, when I passed Major Shorter's house, I found one of

the parlor windows slightly raised, and Jenny sitting by it, hidden in the heavy curtain. I would slip into her hand a note with which I had provided myself before leaving home, receive one in return, press her hand, and be off before her father could see me. This continued for about three weeks, when it was broken up by a rather unpleasant occurrence.

"One evening I had gone with my note as usual, and had placed my hand in through the window, when it was suddenly seized in a vice-like grasp, and the old major thundered, as he threw up the window:

"Now, you scoundrel, I've got you, have I? I'll make you remember me, you impudent villain."

And with that he almost crushed my hand. I yelled with pain.

"It hurts, does it?" growled the old man, savagely. "Not so soft and tender as the hand you expected to squeeze, you villain."

Before this I had been too much surprised to speak; now I cried out, angrily:

"Let my hand alone, Major Shorter. What right have you to treat me in this manner?"

"Right!" he shouted, "right! Zounds, sir, what right have you to stick your hand in at my window? I've a notion to have you arrested as a thief."

"Take care, sir," I exclaimed, trying to wrench my hand from him. "You may regret this."

"Wait till I get out there, and I'll make you regret it."

He released my hand, and started to come out after me, but I did not wait for him. I had no desire to get into a fuss with him, so I took to my heels.

The next day I received a note from the major. It was short and sweet, and somewhat to this effect:

"SIR:—You are an impudent blackguard. In chasing you last night I fell and hurt my leg, which prevents me from seeing you this morning. I write now to inform you that if I catch you lurking around my house again, I shall certainly shoot you."

"Very respectfully yours,  
JOHN SHORTER."

This letter, especially after my experience of the previous night, made me feel very uncomfortable, but I consoled myself with the reflection that you must catch a man before you can hang him. I set to work to devise another plan, and when I had arranged it to

my satisfaction, communicated it to Jenny by slipping a note into her hand at church.

"In the rear of Major Shorter's dwelling was an alley. The back building extended to this alley, and in the second story was a window overlooking it. I asked Jenny in my note to tie her letters to a string and lower them from this window, after dark; I would then get them, and tie my letters to the string in return. This plan worked admirably for a while, but, like the other, was not to last long. One evening I had just tied my letter to the string, when I was startled by a loud 'bang' from the window above, and a smarting in my hands. Away I sped, followed by another report. I heard the old man shouting after me, but did not wait to hear what he had to say. When I got home I examined my hands, which smarted painfully, but the wounds were very slight; the major had evidently loaded his gun with salt, which, while it was quite painful at first, was not dangerous. I was sorely tempted to retaliate upon him, and give him a thrashing, but the reflection that such a course might lose me Jenny, determined me to take it as quietly as possible. I encountered the major on the street the next day, but although he called to me that he wished to see me, I avoided him. I had had enough of him for some time to come.

"I did not see or hear from Jenny for at least a month after this. At last I received a note from her one morning, telling me to come to the house that night, that her father had left the city, and would not return until the next day.

"When night came I hastened to the house, and was met by Jenny at the door. I spent a pleasant evening with her, and was just rising to go away, when we heard the front door open.

"O dear, there's papa now. What shall we do?" exclaimed Jenny, in alarm.

"We had no time to lose, so I told her to be quiet, and concealed myself behind the sofa.

"The major came in directly after, and seeing Jenny's anxious and flurried look, at once suspected the cause of it. He seated himself on the sofa behind which I was concealed, and I heard him give an angry grunt. It was clear my presence was known to him.

"Jenny, dear," he said, "go into the kitchen and tell Tom to bring me a bucket of hot water."

"Shall I tell him to take it up to your room, papa?" asked Jenny, tremulously.

"No, dear, tell him to bring it here."

"In the parlor, papa?"—she began. He cut her short, and replied, sharply:

"Yes, in the parlor. Tell him to be quick about it. Go along, girl. What are you hesitating about?"

"Jenny left the room, and as she went out I heard her crying. I was confident that the old man wanted to scald me, and I had no idea of waiting quietly for him to do so. Still it was no easy matter to retreat. I glanced up over the sofa, to take a look at the state of affairs. The major was sitting with his back to me, and his face to the door through which Jenny had disappeared. He knew well where I was concealed, but he paid no attention to me, so sure was he that he had me in his clutches. My position was desperate, and so was the resolution I formed.

"While his back was still turned to me I sprang to my feet, and giving the sofa a push, sent the major rolling over on the floor, and before he could regain his feet, I had passed through the parlor door, and locked it on the outside. Calling to Jenny to come and release her father, I left the house and returned home.

"Feeling assured that the major would call on me in no very amiable mood the next morning, I left town to avoid seeing him. When I returned, I learned that he had been to my office, and had vowed vengeance against me. I continued to keep out of his way, however, until his wrath subsided, for it was not to my interest to meet him."

"After this I did not see Jenny for a long time. At last, I could stand the separation no longer, so I wrote to Jenny to stay at home the next Sunday morning, and I would see her while her father was at church.

"On the appointed day I was at the house, fully intending to go away before the major should return. Unfortunately, however, I overstayed my time, as usual, and the major came in so suddenly that he cut off my retreat. It was useless to attempt to hide in the parlor, for he knew my tricks too well by this time, so I hurried out of the door leading to the back part of the house, and seeing the door to the cellar open, bolted into it. I was too late, however. The major saw me as I went into the cellar. I had hardly got down the stairs when he came to the door.

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said he, "so you are here again."

"It seems so, sir," I replied, not knowing what else to say.



"How long do you expect to stay?" he asked.

"I was about to go as you came in," I said. "I may as well do so now."

"Not yet," he said, sharply. "You seem so fond of my house that I'll give you more of it than you bargained for. I warrant you, however, you'll not find my cellar as comfortable as my parlor."

"With this he turned off and locked the door on me. I looked around the cellar for some other mode of egress, but could find none. It was a close, well-built cellar, lighted by only one grated window. It was clean and well arranged, but quite cold. Finding that I had no means of escape, I seated myself on a box and tried to make the best of my condition. In a short time I discovered that the major's stock of wine was stored in the cellar. Selecting a bottle of prime old Port, I took out the stopper with my knife, and paid my respects to it. I had no idea how long I was to be kept there."

"About four o'clock in the afternoon the door at the head of the steps opened, and Major Shorter made his appearance."

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said he, mockingly, "how do you like your quarters?"

"Very much, sir," I replied, with an air of unconcern. "I say, major, this is capital old Port you have here."

"Thunder!" shouted the major, "you have not been to my wine, have you?"

"I have taken that liberty, to enliven the monotony of my position," I answered, laughing.

"You have the advantage of me there," said the major, after a pause. "You are not worth a bottle of good Port. Come up, and I'll let you go home."

"I assure you I am very well satisfied, sir," I replied.

"Come up, and be off from here, I say," exclaimed the old man, angrily.

"I went up stairs, carrying with me the bottle from which I had been drinking. As I reached the head of the stairs, the old man broke into a laugh."

"You've been too much for me to-day, Sturgis," he said. "Go home now, and don't repeat your visit."

"I went out of the house, and returned home. A few days after this I received a note from Jeuny, telling me that her father was about to take her to Europe, with the hope of getting rid of me. This brought matters to a crisis, and we determined to set aside

her father's unjust opposition, and take the responsibility of marrying."

"Everything was in readiness. The carriage was at the cross street near Jenny's home, and I was waiting near the door for her. She came out soon, and we hurried to the carriage. It was quite dark when we got there, and helping Jenny into it, I ordered the driver to take us to the Rev. Mr. —'s house. I had hardly gotten into the carriage, when some one on the front seat, whom I had not noticed before, said, quietly:

"Upon my life, this is cool."

"Jenny gave a scream of alarm, and I recognized the voice of Major Shorter. He had discovered our plans, and had taken his seat in the carriage for the purpose of thwarting them."

"And so you two fools are going to be married, and without my consent?"

"You have unjustly withheld it, Major Shorter," I said, "and we have determined to act for ourselves. You have no right to act towards us from such groundless prejudices."

"I expected an angry retort, but the old man spoke very mildly when he replied."

"I have been thinking during the last half hour, Mr. Sturgis," he said, "that I have not acted right about this matter. I will be just towards you. Get out now, and let the carriage take us home, and come to see me in the morning. I promise you, you shall have no cause to complain of me."

"He held out his hand to me; I took it most gladly, and bidding both parties 'good night,' left the carriage."

"The next day I called on the major, and before I left him we arranged matters to our entire satisfaction. He agreed to put me on probation for six months more, and promised that if at the end of that time I was steady and deserving, Jenny should be my wife. I passed the ordeal, married Jenny, and never had a better friend than her father proved. This, dears, is how I won my wife. No doubt you think it rather a queer courtship; and so it was, so it was; but it brought me a dear, good wife."

Uncle Richard fell to poking the fire again, and we all listened to the storm once more.

horse swam by them, probably with the sleigh hanging below in deep water. There was great danger of his coming directly against them and sweeping the lady away from the firm grasp by which she was now held, but the animal passed them and went under the ice below.

Mr. Williams now called to Mr. Cary, but received no reply. He had also disappeared below the surface or under the ice. Help at length came. The people, on hearing the cry, supposed it to proceed from an opening a little further down the river, and hastened to this place first. The mistake lengthened the distance and the time. A rope was first thrown, but Mr. Williams was unable to adjust it. A pole was next extended to them, and in some way, by the aid of this, they succeeded, with much difficulty, in drawing the young lady, now unconscious, upon the ice, and of rescuing her preserver from his perilous position. It was not until several hours after Miss Farrington had been removed to a comfortable room in the village, that she so far recovered as to be conscious.

Such presence of mind and heroism as were displayed by Mr. Williams deserved the highest commendation. It is true that almost any one would willingly risk his life, to a greater or less extent, to save a person from drowning; but we apprehend very few would have the courage and the presence of mind, nerve and skill necessary to accomplish such a feat as this. Miss F. also manifested not a little presence of mind. It occurred to her, when she rose in the water, that if she would float, she must remain motionless and not scream, and thereby force the air out of her lungs. By observing this precaution, and partially buoyed up by her clothes, she was enabled to float with the current the long distance of thirty-two rods from where she was taken out. It is also a remarkable fact that about five minutes before the accident happened, she discovered that the strings of her cap had become loose, and tied them. It was mainly by the strength of these strings that she was drawn against the eddying current, until her head was above the water and ice. Words cannot express the gratitude felt by the parents and friends of the young lady towards her deliverer.

## A THRILLING ADVENTURE.

On the evening of the 28th of December, a party of four persons started from Winona to Trempealeau, Minnesota. The party consisted of Mr. Sheldon C. Cary, one of the publishers of Winona Republican, and Miss Mary Farrington, in one sleigh, and Mr. William W. Williams and Miss Mary F. White in another sleigh. They were out for a pleasure ride on the river. When near Trempealeau they made a mistake, which has often been made by parties not perfectly familiar with the road, and instead of turning to the left a short distance above the village and taking the channel of the river leading to the place, they passed to the right of the island opposite the place, and discovered their mistake only when, having passed the island, the lights of the village appeared in the distance to the left and behind them. The party then turned and directed their course up and across the river, guided by the lights of the village. Mr. Cary was ahead and driving at a brisk trot, his spirited horse holding his head high and wholly depending upon the bit for guidance. He remarked to Miss Farrington that, as they had strayed away from the beaten road, they had been fortunate in escaping air-holes in the ice. Hardly had he finished the words when the fatal plunge was made, and the dark and ice-cold water closed over their heads.

Mr. Williams was only about two rods behind. He instantly reined his horse, sprang from his sleigh, and ran to the edge of the ice. He saw his friend struggling with his horse in the rapid current, and called to him, "Where's Mary?" "Oh, God! I don't know!" was the reply. Williams now saw the young lady on the surface below him, floating rapidly down. He ran below and endeavored to approach the edge of the ice, but twice he found himself sinking on portions of ice broken off by his own weight, and from which he leaped back to the solid ice. She was now so far under the dark current that he could not see but little more than her cap, and this but dimly. He succeeded in getting below her again, discovering a projecting portion of ice under which, should she pass, all hope would be gone. It was the work of an instant to prostrate himself on the ice and push out so far as to reach beyond this edge. He was now ready, and as the sinking girl floated toward him, he could hear her praying that she might be saved. "I can save you now, Mary," was the word of encouragement, but as she came within his reach a firm grasp upon her cap with his left hand was all that he could get.

The long reach which he was compelled to make, the sinking of her body as the weight of his hand rested upon her head, and the force of the current, came near drawing him entirely off the ice. But carefully balancing himself, he succeeded in getting her head out of the water, and by taking hold of her arm with his right hand, and placing his left hand on ice—the glove of which instantly froze fast—he was enabled to get her in such a position that he could hold her until help, attracted by their cries, arrived, which was in about half an hour. The village was half a mile off, but by the assistance of Miss White, some one was made to hear the cry. How long must have been those fearful minutes before the help arrived! When holding on this way the

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you from England very soon. Will you remain here until you hear from me?"

Still she made no reply, but continued to sit with the same set, rigid look, staring at the carpet.

"Will you not even answer me, Agnes? I am going to England early in the morning; I must not stay, and I know you do not wish it; but are we to part without a word even?"

With all his hardness and ruggedness, her silence hurt him. It touched his tenderest spot, by wounding his self-love. He rose from his chair and faced her.

"There, good-by," he said. "Even if you do not answer me, I must say good-by."

He moved a step towards the door, but he went no further. At that first effort to leave her, Agnes, hitherto silent, hitherto rigid, rose from her seat, and followed him. The crimson blood ran like a tide over her white face, and, springing towards him, she flung her arms round his neck, while these words broke out from her dumbness:

"George, George! do not leave me! I cannot part with you!—right or wrong, I cannot part with you. Father or child are alike nothing to me, in comparison with you."

Her resolve astonished and perplexed him. Stay with her!—it was impossible; yet how to tell her all the rest now? Her arms were still pressed round his neck. She drew him away with her from the door to a sofa near the fire.

"You are not in earnest—you are not going?" she whispered. "Let the past die; we will live for the future only."

He shook his head. "As soon as I got the letter telling me of your father's death, I ought to have told you, and have left you. You don't see this to-night, but you will see it to-morrow, when you are calmer."

"Will you not stay until to-morrow, then? Give me till to-morrow to think." She put her hand to her head, as if it pained her. "Will you stay here, and not leave the hotel to-night?"

He thought a moment, and then said, "Yes, I will remain here, in this room. I can't sleep. I'll sit up and read or write; but you must go to bed and seek for rest. You will be ill to-morrow if you do not."

How little she knew of his thoughts! Treacherous always, he meant to steal away towards morning while she slept, and write to her from London.

"There is no use in my going to bed, I cannot sleep," she said.

"You will sleep if you try. If you sit up I won't remain."

He conquered her after a minute or two, and she went to bed and lay wakeful with a reeling brain, thinking it all over. He had never even told her how it happened. In three or four hours she fell asleep, and slept soundly. What time had elapsed she did not know; but when she awoke, there was a light in the room, and she was conscious of some one leaning over her. She started up.

"George, what is the matter?" She put her hand on his arm, and felt it trembling. Then she observed that he wore his travelling cloak, and she leaned back. Was he going, after all?

"Agnes, I have been thinking this over all night, and the more I consider it, the more I feel that I cannot remain here. I did not like to part without seeing you again, and I came to say farewell to you in your sleep."

This was true. Dark as his nature was, her pain and her love had softened him; and when it came to the last, he did not like to leave her without a look, without a word. Agnes pleaded and clung to him.

"Will you not even wait to tell me how it happened, if it is to part now? But to shall not. You will think differently yet, and come back."

"Perhaps so," he said, evasively. "But whatever decision we come to, remember that your father's death was not intended by me. We had words about you; we quarrelled; he struck me, and we fought."

"Yes, yes; I knew it was an accident—a quarrel in the heat of passion, or something of the kind. A second thought told me you would not willingly have hurt him."

How mercifully she viewed his faults! This was the secret that had been preying on his mind all these months. It was remorse for her father's death, and his repentance pleaded with her for him.

"You will remain here until I write to you from England, or send a friend over."

"A friend! Why are you going to send a friend?" she asked, in a tone of surprise.

"O, to make some arrangements as to your future," he said.

"My future! I do not understand you."

"I mean in case this event parts us. Agnes, you may wish it in your cooler moments; and I, too, want time to think about it."

He was deceiving her again; going from her, and not meaning to return, yet throwing an air of uncertainty over it, lest he would drive her wild.

"O, nothing but partings! nothing but partings and sorrow!" she moaned.

He was moved visibly, even his iron nerves gave way a little.

"O Agnes! I wish we had never met! Can you not say it with me now?"

"No, no! not even yet!" she said, while her tears fell on her clasped hands.

He stood looking at her. "Heaven forgive me all my injustice, and cruelty, and wrong," he muttered. But what availed the prayer while the wrong remained uncancelled? Agnes looked up, and met his eye; but her ear did not catch his murmured prayer.

"Let us part in peace," he said, drawing her nearer

to him. "Whatever the future may hold for both of us, let us part in peace to-night."

"O, may we some day meet in peace again!" she said, catching up the child that lay beside her, and pushing its sleeping face over to its father. "Think of us both, George, while we are away from you."

Think of them. Yes; but how? As dangerous quicksands, in which the new vessel he was piloting might sink; or as longing hearts that were to welcome his return? He said nothing, but stooped and kissed the child, and then touched its mother's forehead lightly with his lips.

"You will write to me soon, George?" she pleaded through her falling tears.

"Yes, very soon," he said, as he went away from her, not without remorse; not utterly without feeling for her distress.

CHAPTER XXXVI.  
THE CLOUDS BREAK.

THE HERBERTS came back to Paris, and Agnes told them everything. The tale was a terrible one to listen to, and Mrs. Herbert, as she heard it, felt her heart shudder against this man whom she had never seen. She did not tell her thoughts to Agnes, whose voice was pleading for him even as her heart battled sorely in his behalf. Was he not her husband? And that bond of union was blotting out the remembrance that his hand had slain her father.

The full pain of his death had not come to her while Villaret was present, except in the first moment of her hearing it; but in his absence she found it more difficult to chase it away, and with it mingled a burning anxiety to know when he would write and make known to her what decision he had come to.

Yes, what would he say when he wrote to her? Would he tell her he was coming back repentant for all the past, to be with her until death should part them? What would he say? Again and again she asked herself the question, while she waited for those promised lines which did not come. A week had worn away, and then another, yet still no word or message reached her; and during the weary vigil of waiting and watching, time had gone by with leaden wings.

"It is very good of you to stay here, Mrs. Herbert," she said, one night, when they were all three seated before a pleasant fire in the Herberts' apartments. "But perhaps I may not detain you much longer. Do you know I have been thinking to-day that George is waiting to settle some matters in England, and that he will come to me, instead of writing?"

She looked up hopefully, as if anxious that they should think so to.

"And if it be so, what will you do?" Mrs. Herbert asked.

"If he came, I would forget everything, except that I was his wife." The color was red upon her cheek as she spoke.

Arthur Herbert raised his head and looked into her eyes, and in them he read the depth of that great love which could wipe away from her memory the stained spot where her husband's sin lay. A momentary pause followed Agnes's last words, during which the door opened slowly, and Wilhelm appeared on the threshold. His face was, as usual, calm, except the restless dark eyes with which he scanned the group before him.

"A letter for madame," he said.

She took it with an eager, nervous grasp, and the servant went slowly out, watching her as he went. He knew as well as she did that her fate lay within the folds of that morsel of paper. Holding the letter in her hand, Agnes approached the lamp.

"He has written, after all," she said, as she broke the seal. "But perhaps it is to say he is coming."

The flush of hope mingled with fear was on her face as she threw the envelope on the table, and, unfolding the letter with trembling fingers, began to read. A moment or two passed in the hush of that unbroken silence, when Mrs. Herbert laid her hand on Arthur's arm. He looked up and followed her eyes to Agnes's face. The brightness of the flush on her cheek had died away, and she was as pale as death.

"Agnes, what is the matter?" Arthur asked, springing to his feet and approaching her, followed by his mother. "Is there any evil tidings from your husband? Is he not coming to you?"

"No, I shall never see him—never any more!" she said, speaking in a low, hopeless tone. "There, read it."

She threw the letter towards Arthur, and, turning away, began to pace up and down the room. Mrs. Herbert stood by the window watching her, thinking it was better to leave her alone for a little, while Arthur took up the letter she had tossed over to him, and, nearing the light, began to read it. It was a short, cold letter, and ran thus:

"DEAR AGNES:—I only write to say that my opinion respecting the separation between us remains unaltered. We cannot meet again; do not urge it, for it is impossible. There are other reasons for our parting even stronger than the unfortunate accident to your father—reasons which I cannot explain to you now, but which shall be fully stated by a confidential friend of mine, who will be in Paris in a few days. This friend is authorized by me to make a handsome provision for your future and your son's."

This was all on that side of the paper, for Villaret's handwriting was large and irregular, filling the sheet with those scanty, breathless lines. Arthur turned over one leaf; a word or two only and the signature were on the other side. He read it, and then moved back a step in utter amazement.

"Agnes," he said, speaking with great excitement, "is this man your husband? Why did you not tell me so before?"

She paused in her walk, and then approached him.

"What man?" she asked, scarcely knowing at the moment what she said, and totally forgetting she had given him the letter to read. He put his finger below the name, and held it towards her. "My husband? yes," she said, looking up with a surprise upon her still white face. "Do you know him?"

"I do. Why did you not tell me this before?"

Mrs. Herbert came round the table to her son, and looked over Agnes's shoulder. Arthur moved the letter near her so as to let her eyes fall on the name.

"George Fleming," she read aloud. "What George Fleming? O Arthur, surely it is not—"

"It is George Fleming of Griffin's Court," he said, filling up her unfinished sentence.

Agnes turned from the mother to the son in utter bewilderment.

"What is it—O, what is it? You know something. Will you tell it to me, whatever it may be?"

She laid her hand upon Arthur's arm, and looked up beseechingly into his face. Perhaps he knew those things which Fleming's friend was coming to explain, and she would rather hear them now than wait.

"You are married to this man, Agnes?" Arthur said, fixing his eyes earnestly on her face.

"Married to him? Yes."

"Hush, Arthur, hush," Mrs. Herbert interposed, entreatingly. "I know what you are going to say; you are too precipitate."

Agnes looked from one to the other, anxiously.

"Let me hear it, Mrs. Herbert, let me hear it. You know something of George. Is he in danger, or trouble, or sorrow? Tell me, Arthur—O, tell me!"

She laid her hand upon his, which rested on the table.

"Wait till to-morrow, Agnes," Mrs. Herbert said, gain, before her son had time to speak. "You shall know all to-morrow."

"I must hear it now; I could not wait all the long hours of the night in suspense, indeed I could not."

"She is right, mother; she had best hear it now," Arthur said.

"Yes, Arthur, you will tell me, I know you will. Is he in danger, or sorrow, or trouble—trouble with his father or with any one?"

"He has no father, Agnes."

"No father?" she repeated, in surprise.

"No, he is dead."

Another deceit, and why? Because she would have called upon him to fulfil his promise of bringing her to England as his wife. She saw it all plainly now. It was clear as noonday.

"Sit down, Agnes, dear," Mrs. Herbert said, kindly, "and he will tell you all the rest, for there remains much more behind."

She suffered them to lead her to a sofa, and she sat down, Mrs. Herbert sitting by her, while Arthur stood and spoke.

"Don't be shocked, Agnes; he shall not do it—we will take care that he shall not—but Fleming has gone to England to be—"

"What, Arthur, what?" And the white face of the deserted girl was turned up to him appealingly.

"To be married to another woman."

"Married! It is impossible; I won't believe it," she said, starting up.

"But it shall not take place; we will stop it, Agnes. Our discovery of this prior marriage of yours puts such wrong to you and the girl he has chosen, out of his power."

"Let him wrong her," she said, passionately. "I'll not stir a finger to prevent it; but I'll claim him from her by a power greater than that with which she stole him away from me."

"Hush, Agnes, dear; O, hush," Mrs. Herbert said, soothingly, while Arthur stood bewildered by the storm he had raised. "She did not steal him away from you. She is not even aware of your existence. Willingly, most willingly, would she resign him to you, Agnes, for she does not love him."

Her momentary passion of jealousy died away, and she sank back upon the sofa, burying her face in her hands.

"She does not love him," she moaned, "and he has left me, deserted and alone, for a woman who does not love him!"

Presently she grew calmer and sat up.

"Who is this girl?" she asked.

"Edith Wynne, the affianced wife of my poor Ralph. Will you not save her now, Agnes?"

"How can I save her—what am I to do?" she asked, wearily.

"Come to England and assert your prior marriage," Arthur answered. "Meet your husband face to face, and he dare not deny the truth."

"No, no; not yet, not yet," she said, cowering close within the shelter of Mrs. Herbert's protecting arms.

"Leave her alone for to-night, Arthur; to-morrow we can make our arrangements. She can bear it better then," Mrs. Herbert said, signing to her son to quit the room. And he obeyed her, leaving the poor deserted girl alone with her gentle comforter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.  
EDITH'S WEDDING-DAY.

It was a fine, clear, cold February morning. The gray dawn was breaking over the sky and across the old trees and frost-white lawn at Grace Park. Already all the shutters of the house were open, and the smoke of its many chimneys was ascending in blue volumes to the clouds.

No. 6.—COMPLETE IN SIX NUMBERS.

CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.  
A THRILLING EUROPEAN TALE.

BY JOHN M. LOVELAND.



ILLERET sat watching the working of the blow he had given, yet he was not utterly unmoved by her distress. He had struck upon a terrible device in telling her this truth, which he had so sedulously concealed from her for so many months. And now he watched its effect with a touch of pity at his heart, mingled with and overpowered by a strong, selfish wish for its success. Once or twice the desire to exculpate himself so pressed upon him, that it almost prevailed over his more cautious calculations.

If he were a villain and a murderer in her eyes, it would mitigate her acquiescence in that parting, which was now a matter of absolute necessity to him. It would stifle all her love, and stifle all her wish to be with him. The weighty chain that had clung to him for months was fast dropping from his limbs. Let her think him guilty, hardened, cold—anything, so that it induced her to set him free. He still sat looking at her, and thinking what would she do in the end. Presently he spoke.

"Agnes, will you try and control yourself now? I want to speak to you." She took her hands from her face, and held them out towards him, as if pushing him from her, although he had never left his chair.

"Do not be afraid, I am not coming near you," he said, as he observed her posture. "I ought to have left you long since, but I lacked the courage to tell you the real truth. It was such a terrible thing to speak of, that I shrink from it." She had not put her hands back to her face again, but they lay in her lap, while she sat with her eyes fixed, staring at the carpet. Villaret paused, and then went on: "I have more to say to you, Agnes, than what I have said already; but I cannot say it to-night. I will write to

It was Edith's wedding-day, and she was up early that morning, so that Mrs. Wynne found her sitting by the window of her dressing-room, gazing out towards the old wood, that hid in its depths the scene of a terrible tragedy. Well Mrs. Wynne knew the meaning of that straining gaze; and as she passed the window she drew down the blind.

"Those bare trees look dull and cheerless, do they not, darling?" she said; as if in excuse for the act.

Edith put her hand to her temple. "My head aches," she said; "it has been aching all night. O, mother dear, I wish I was—"

"Where, dear?" Mrs. Wynne asked, seeing her pause.

"Where it would not ache any more," she answered.

"O Edith, do not talk so. God is the best judge of that. His will be done."

"Is it God's will that I am to marry Mr. Fleming?"

"I cannot tell; I suppose so," Mrs. Wynne replied, hesitatingly.

Edith said no more, but bent her head on to her mother's shoulder, and lay there as she used to do long ago in her happy childhood. An hour passed without either of them speaking, until Annette, Edith's maid, came in to dress her young mistress for her bridal.

"Is your head better, dear?" Mrs. Wynne asked, as Edith, disturbed by Annette's entrance, raised it off her shoulder.

"I don't know; I think not. Is it getting late?" she asked, confusedly.

Mrs. Wynne looked at her watch, and finding it nearly eight o'clock, sent Annette to bring some coffee, as both she and Miss Wynne needed refreshment. The coffee came, but Mrs. Wynne found it difficult to prevail on Edith to take any, and she failed utterly in getting her to eat; so the cheerless breakfast went away almost untasted.

What a mockery it was, all that satin and lace, and orange flowers, and the cases of unpriized jewelry, with which poor Edith was surrounded! It was like the bridal of the Nile, where a beautiful maiden, richly attired and wreathed with flowers, passed away from the glad earth, in the morning of her youth and loveliness, down into the cold, flowing water of the river, amid the songs and rejoicing of an assembled multitude.

There was bustle round Grace Park, within and without; bustle in the large supper-room, where the servants were putting the last touches to the arrangements for the breakfast which was to follow that weary wedding; bustle in the yard, where the coachman was strutting about in wedding favors, waiting for the horses to be put to the carriage in which he was to drive his young lady to church; bustle, too, in Mrs. Wynne's dressing-room, where she was trying to catch the few fleeting moments left her before she must be ready to attend Edith to Abbotsville church, in order to witness that ceremony from which her kind motherly heart recoiled. What could she do? Who could blame her for the part she acted? It was the part of a weak woman, certainly; but poor Mrs. Wynne had never been formed to contend against circumstances. She could mourn over, but she could not conquer them. Alas! women can rarely do aught but console or grieve. They must sit with clasped hands, tied and powerless; their lot does not lie in the strength to act, but in the strength to suffer. Poor Mrs. Wynne's gentle nature was sorely tried, sorely wrung, to witness Edith's sorrow and sacrifice, but what could she do? Nothing.

It wanted but a few minutes to eleven o'clock, and the marriage had been fixed for eleven. Mrs. Wynne hurried off to fetch Edith. The carriage was at the door, the horses tossing their manes disdainfully, and pawing the ground, impatient to be off.

"Come, dear, we shall be late," Edith rose, and followed her mechanically.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### HASTENING TO THE RESCUE.

LATE on the night before the day fixed for Edith's marriage, Mrs. Herbert, Arthur, and Agnes Fleming stepped from a first-class carriage on to the platform at Swanson, a town lying some twenty miles from Abbotsville.

"I don't like stopping here to-night," Arthur said to his mother, as they alighted. "It is only another twenty miles; shall we try to get on?"

"Agnes is not able. We have come too rapidly already," Mrs. Herbert answered. "Surely we shall have time enough to reach Grace Park in the morning. Ask what hour the first train starts to-morrow."

Arthur turned away impatiently. "That's the worst of taking a pressing journey with ladies. They are sure to stop at the wrong moment," he muttered, as he walked up the platform to the guard.

"What hour does the first train start for Abbotsville in the morning?"

"Six o'clock, sir, and gets in before seven."

"That is rather early. The next?"

"Why, it goes at eight, and gets in before nine."

"Thank you," Arthur said, turning away towards his party again.

"Well?" Mrs. Herbert said, as he approached them.

"The two earliest trains are at six o'clock and eight o'clock. Of course, six is too soon for you to be astray, after your long journey to-day, but we must be ready by eight. For my part, I don't know why, but I would rather get on to-night," he added, looking wistfully at the carriages they had left, the engine attached to which was just beginning to give

indications of a speedy move. "Do you think you could manage it, Agnes?"

"O, I am so very tired," she said, "after this long day's journey; and baby too is weary, and needs rest."

"Yes, we are all tired, Arthur," Mrs. Herbert said, seconding Agnes's wish. "You great strong men have no idea of our weak frames. Come, be merciful," she added, smiling, "and find us a cab."

Arthur looked wistfully at the carriages. Should he go alone and make all things sure? What if they should be late by any chance? It was strange, that longing he had to be at Abbotsville. But a second thought showed him the impossibility of leaving the ladies and the child to travel alone; so, without giving words to his wish, he seized the boy, and said, cheerfully:

"Here goes, then, for the hotel. Come, Georgie, help Uncle Arthur to get a cab for mama."

The desired cab was secured, and the little party soon found themselves round a comfortable supper-table, while the train was whirling away towards Abbotsville.

"Come, Agnes, eat," Arthur said. "You look as pale as death, girl; you must get up your strength for to-morrow."

"Don't talk of to-morrow," Mrs. Herbert rejoined, kindly; "it will be time enough when it comes."

"I am not afraid of it," Agnes answered. "I know what I am doing, and the consequences, too. It will part George and me forever, and yet I feel strangely brave. I think that the having to battle for my child has given me courage."

Arthur rose and went to the window.

"What a villain that Fleming is!" he muttered to himself.

"Go to bed, Agnes dear," Mrs. Herbert suggested. She had heard Arthur's muttered condemnation, although Agnes had not. "Come away, darling, and we will leave this perverse son of mine an opportunity to smoke a cigar."

Agnes smiled a little faint smile, and taking up her son, who lay asleep upon her knee, bade Arthur good-night, and followed Mrs. Herbert out of the room.

Arthur sat up alone, smoking and thinking. Of the exact time that he went to bed, I have no especial record, but I know that the next morning he was up betimes, and down-stairs before either his mother or Agnes. Presently they made their appearance, both seeming much refreshed by the night's rest. Agnes looked flushed and excited, and was all eagerness to pursue her journey. There was an unnatural strain about her, a hurry for departure, a restless, fidgety desire to be on her feet—doing and preparing, putting on George's hat and mufflers, and even searching for Arthur's gloves, which were out of the way somewhere. She was ready for anything, except to sit still and eat her breakfast, which she scarcely touched—ready for anything except thought, in fact; and all her bustling activity was but an effort to kill it—an effort to keep down a bodily weakness and a mental shrinking that she feared would overcome her at the last.

The morning was wearing away; it was nearly eight o'clock. They must hurry to the train now, the last moment was almost come. Arthur had gone down to pay the bill while the waiter called a cab, and the light luggage they had brought from Paris was stowed on the top. Back to the breakfast-room Arthur ran lightly up the stairs, two steps at a time.

"Everything is ready. Come, mother; come, Agnes; it's ten minutes to eight, so we must be off."

Georgie's hat had been on and off twenty times that morning, and it was off again when Arthur came back. Agnes caught it up and put it on the child's head, tying the strings hastily; her fingers trembled so she could scarcely get the ribbon fastened.

"How awkward I am!" she said, trying to smile at her own nervousness. "There, that will do now—what a crooked bow it is! but it is no matter."

It is wonderful how we observe little things at times; even under the pressure of excitement Agnes's eye observed Georgie's crooked bow, though her mind was full of such weighty cares.

Arthur snatched up the boy, and carried him down stairs, followed by Mrs. Herbert and Agnes. By the time they reached the hall he had him in a cab, and had turned back to meet them. The flush had gone out of Agnes's face, but Arthur could not see how white it was through her thick veil.

"Mother dear, you are the strongest," he said, as an apology for giving Agnes his arm; "will you follow us, for we have not a moment to lose?"

He felt Agnes trembling on his arm—trembling and leaning heavily. They got to the door of the hotel, and then, as she gave another forward step, she stumbled—stumbled on a step, or something, as Arthur supposed, and he put out his other arm to catch her. She recovered herself, however, but stood quite still.

"Arthur, I can't go on just yet," she said, faintly.

"Let me sit down."

There was a long bench in the hall, and he led her to it. What was to be done? Would she be better in a moment, or must they lose the train? Mrs. Herbert took off her bonnet, so as to give her air. She had not fainted, but her face was deadly white, and she leaned back against the wall, seemingly helpless. Georgie was still in the cab; every one forgot him.

"Bring her water," Mrs. Herbert suggested; "it may revive her."

Arthur and the waiter went off on the same errand. The waiter returned first with the water, and Arthur followed him. The barmaid had come from the bar,

good-naturedly, with a glass of wine, but Agnes would not touch it. Mrs. Herbert took the tumbler of water from the man, and put it to her lips; she swallowed a few drops, and then put out her hand and pushed the tumbler away. It seemed to revive her, for in a minute or two she moved her head, and looked round at the group which stood about her. Mrs. Herbert offered her more water, and this time she put her own hand to the tumbler, although Mrs. Herbert held it too, and drank nearly all its contents.

"There, I am better now," she said, trying to get up. "We must get on, you know."

She remembered her imperative journey through it all. But precious minutes had been spent already, and perhaps the train was gone. Arthur looked at his watch, it was just within a minute or two of eight; but the station was close, and they might win it yet. With the help of his arm, Agnes reached the cab, and they drove off. When they arrived on the platform, the carriages were drawn up in a long line, and the engine snorting vehemently.

"There we have it!" Arthur exclaimed; "it's not gone yet."

Even as he spoke the guard's whistle sounded, and before he could take another step nearer, the train was in motion. Whiz, whiz; it went, slowly at first, but gradually increasing in speed, until even the smoke was lost in the far distance.

Arthur stood aghast. O, if he had only gone on last night in spite of them! Mrs. Herbert and Agnes wore faces of blank dismay.

A porter was passing up the platform; there was hope left yet; if another train went at nine, or ten even, it might do.

"What hour does the next train go to Abbotsville?" he asked, as the man approached him.

"Eleven o'clock, sir," the man answered, and went on his way.

Eleven o'clock! They ought to be at Abbotsville before eleven o'clock. What was to be done? Arthur stood thinking, and the two ladies watched him anxiously. On his brain and energy everything depended now. Telegraph? Should he telegraph to stop the wedding? No; he must assign a reason for such a proceeding, and how could he have a thing like this flying through Abbotsville? So he gave up the telegraph, and decided on taking a post-chaise from the hotel, and by driving for life and death they might have time enough yet. They consulted for a few moments, and then drove back to the hotel, to wait until Arthur procured the carriage.

"If you drive hard you'll do the twenty miles in the time," Arthur said to the post-boy, when all was ready at last, and the ladies seated in the chaise.

"I'll give you a sovereign if we are not late."

The man touched his hat with a smile.

"I'll earn your money, sir, don't fear."

"Do you know the way? Be sure and don't take a circuit."

"Never you mind, sir. I've driven this road ever since I was a little fellow; I know every stone on it. We'll not go the Abbotsville way, sir; that's the way the railway goes, but the other is shorter."

"Very well," Arthur said, jumping in. "All right now, and get on as fast as you can."

The door was slammed to, the post-boy cracked his whip, and the horses, obedient to the sound, started off at a pace that soon left Swanson behind them.

A long hour of silence followed, during which they were momentarily shortening the distance between them and the goal they hoped to reach. Agnes leaned back in the carriage, with her veil drawn over her face and her arms round her son, who, still oppressed by the remains of yesterday's fatigue, had fallen asleep soon after they left Swanson; while Mrs. Herbert looked out of the window, watching the trees as they flew past, and thinking, would they be in time?

The same thought was filling the minds of Agnes and Arthur. What, after all, if they were late? The minutes were flying apace, and they were still many miles from their destination. Herbert looked at his watch.

"Get on faster," he said, putting his head out of the window, and addressing the post-boy. "We shall never do it at this rate, I'm afraid."

"Don't fear, sir," the man answered, confidently. "I know the road and the horses too. If I work them too hard they'll break down; just leave them to me, sir."

Arthur drew in his head. Late or not late, it was out of his hands now; he was powerless; and he leaned back despairingly against the cushions. He wished that he had telegraphed from Swanson. He ought to have telegraphed; he felt that now, when he was unable to repair his error.

"Mother," he said, anxiously, "I wonder when they'll be married?"

"I don't know; about eleven, I should think. What o'clock is it?"

"Half-past ten," Agnes said, answering the question. "We shall be late; Arthur, tell me the truth, do you think we shall be late?"

"I hope not, Agnes."

"How far is it from Abbotsville?" she asked.

"We are not going through Abbotsville, but to Grace Park direct; we can't be far off it now. Grace Park is best; it would be dreadfully awkward to drive to the church; I would avoid that, except as a last resource."

"But if they have gone there we must follow them, must we not?"

"Yes, yes; but I trust it will not be needed."

There was silence again for a few minutes.

"It was all my perversity and selfishness," Agnes said, presently. "I ought to have gone on last night; I see it now, but it is too late. See"—she held out her watch—"a quarter to eleven, and not at Grace Park yet." She threw up the window next her, and called out, "Drive, will you, for life and death! We are too late—too late!"

At her voice the man's whip descended on the horses, and they plunged forward at a tremendous speed. He had kept them in reserve for this. The rolling wheels splashed up the mud from the heavy roads into Agnes's face, but she did not heed it. She leaned far out, watching for the first sight of the gates of Grace Park, and Arthur told her they were near it now. The rolling of the carriage-wheels and the rapid gallop of the horses was all the sound which was audible. The trees and fields flew by, dazzling her eyes, but still there was no appearance of the looked-for gates. One moment only Agnes removed her gaze from the road, and turned towards Arthur.

"Suppose they are gone to the church, and that we have to follow; how far is it from Grace Park to Abbotsville?"

"Two miles."

"Two miles!" she repeated after him; "two miles, with spent horses! Arthur, we shall be late!"

The same fear was at his own heart, and had been there the past hour.

"O, that I had telegraphed," he said. "What a madman I was to neglect it! But see, Agnes, he added, here are the Grace Park gates."

She looked out eagerly, and there they stood, offering their cold, iron front to her anxious gaze. She glanced at her watch. Five minutes to eleven. The marriage was fixed for eleven. Will they be in time?

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### AT THE CHURCH.

THE bridegroom was already at the church, eagerly watching for the bride. The clergyman, too, was at his post, while a goodly array of villagers crowded round the church gates, eager to witness the expected pageant. Every one watched anxiously the turn of the road round which the bride's carriage would first appear in view. Everybody watched and waited; but she did not come.

Eleven o'clock now, and the bridegroom was still waiting for the bride, with his watch in his hand, marking the fleeting moments. A quarter past, and there was the sound of a bustle round the gates, whose murmur soon reached the church. A servant in the Wynne livery was galloping on towards it from the direction of Grace Park, riding as if for life and death. On he came at full speed, and, dashing through the crowd, which opened to let him pass, sprung from his horse at the door, and entered.

What was the matter? Mr. Fleming met him in the aisle with a blanched face, and inquired with nervous eagerness, whether anything was wrong at Grace Park.

"You are wanted at the Park, sir. Miss Edith cannot come here to-day. Something has happened at the house, sir, and they are waiting for you."

Fleming stood like one petrified for a moment, and then he said:

"What is the matter? Is Miss Wynne ill?"

He asked the question anxiously, the fear of it was oppressing him.

"I don't know, sir—I didn't hear, but I believe not," the man answered.

Fleming was moving towards the door, but he turned back to ask the question:

"Who sent for me? Was it Miss Wynne?"

"No sir. My master came out in a great hurry to the stable to me, and bid me ride like mad and bring you back to the Park."

Again Fleming moved towards the door, and again he hesitated.

"Are you sure Miss Wynne is not ill?"

The groom twirled his hat in his hand, as if considering, and then he said:

"I really don't know, sir, but I think not."

Fleming turned away, there was no questioning the man any more. The clergyman who was to have read the marriage service followed him, and touched his arm.

"Is there anything wrong at Grace Park?" he asked.

"Wrong!" Fleming repeated; "I really don't know. This man tells me Miss Wynne can't come here to-day."

"Then we are to have no wedding?"

"Not now, at all events," Fleming answered, as he went out.

The guests invited to the marriage were nearly all in the church, and more were arriving. They gathered round the clergyman, and helped him to question the groom, wondering at the news.

While they talked and marvelled, and the crowd round the church gates talked and marvelled too, Fleming sprang into his carriage, and drove as fast as the horses could go to Grace Park. He drew down the blinds and leaned his head forward on his hands. The sudden summons had bewildered him. What could be the cause of it? He recalled to his original fear. Edith must be ill, for no other reason would, they postpone the ceremony at the last moment. The tension of the past weeks on her nerves had been too much for her, and she had given way at the very moment when he was about to consummate his successful tyranny.

A thousand fears haunted him during that terrible drive, and the minutes which it occupied seemed, hours of time. Yet a suspicion of the truth never

once struck him. Was Edith ill? Was she dying? Was she dead? Questions such as these flitted through his brain, while the horses, urged to their utmost speed, dashed on to Grace Park. Yet, as I have said, through it all not even a faint glimmer of the truth crossed his mind.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE CHASTISEMENT.

A POST-CHARGE with bay horses was standing before the door of Grace Park when Fleming drove up. It was a shabby, dark carriage, splashed with mud, and the horses, reeking with heat and covered with foam, bespoke a long and rapid journey.

The post-chaise moved aside, as in duty bound, at Fleming's approach, so as to leave space for his more pretentious conveyance, which pulled up with a sweep. Fleming, without waiting for the servant to open the door, threw it open himself, and instantly alighting, hurried up the steps. Before he had time to lay his hand upon the bell the door was opened by a servant.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as he entered.

"Why was I sent for?"

"I don't know, sir," the man answered with great respect.

"Is Miss Wynne ill?"

"No, sir."

"Where is Mr. Wynne?"

"In the drawing-room, sir; where he desired you to be shown when you came."

"This is some rebellious whim of Edith's," Fleming thought, as he followed the man; "such nonsense will be very inconvenient just now."

In the drawing-room were Mr. and Mrs. Wynne, with another gentleman, whom Fleming could not see distinctly, for he sat with only the side of his face turned towards him, and even that was shaded by a book, which he appeared to be reading. Mr. and Mrs. Wynne rose to meet him, but the stranger did not stir except to glance at him for a moment, and retire again behind his book.

Something unusual had occurred; Fleming read it in the grave faces which met his as he came in, and he said, hurriedly:

"You look very serious. Is there anything wrong?"

"We have had unexpected visitors, whose arrival and business has somewhat startled us; that is all," Mr. Wynne said, pushing a chair towards Fleming, and then resuming his own.

Fleming did not accept the offered seat, but crossed over to the fire, and took up his favorite position, with one arm leaning on the corner of the mantelpiece. He looked uneasy and perplexed.

"I really don't understand, Mr. Wynne, why I have been sent for, or why these visitors, whoever they are, should interfere with, or interrupt my marriage."

Mr. Wynne looked towards his wife appealingly. He was afraid of Fleming, and he could not in a moment throw off the hold he had upon him. Mrs. Wynne answered the look by saying quietly:

"This marriage cannot take place now, Mr. Fleming."

"Not now! What do you mean? Not to-day?"

"Not to-day, nor to-morrow, nor at all."

The red blood flew to his face, and then receded.

"Who says that it shall not?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Do, Mr. Fleming," a voice answered from the other end of the room, and the strange gentleman rose, laid down his book, and approached the circle round the fire.

Fleming looked at him in utter surprise, and then bowed slightly and stiffly. It was Arthur Herbert.

"You do, Mr. Herbert! What have you to do with it?"

"Much," he said. "As the friend of Miss Wynne's childhood, and the brother of her intended husband, I have much to do with it, and I say it shall not take place."

Fleming's blood ran cold. Was Ralph Herbert's brother there, at the eleventh hour, to disappoint him, to take the reins of his power over the Wynnes out of his hands by a transfer of the mortgage? That was all he thought of, nothing else ever crossed his mind. He did not dream that behind the folding doors, which divided the room he stood in from the next, his young German wife was sitting, pale and trembling, with her child upon her knee, receiving what strength and comfort love could give her from Edith and Mrs. Herbert.

"Edith—let me see Edith!" Fleming said, at length, as these thoughts rapidly ran through his mind. "She has given me her promise, and I will appeal to her to keep it."

"She cannot keep it, Mr. Fleming," Mrs. Wynne interposed, as Arthur was about to reply. "She promised to be your wife, and that promise cannot be fulfilled."

"You are talking in riddles this morning," he said, impatiently. "Will you let me see Edith? Tell her to come to me!—beg her to come to me!"

"She is in the other room; shall I go for her?" Arthur said, appealing to her mother.

Mrs. Wynne nodded assent, and Arthur, opening the folding doors, passed through, only half-closing them after him. A moment or two elapsed after he had gone, during which Fleming could hear the murmur of two or three voices speaking in an undertone. They were women's voices evidently, and now and then he heard Arthur's in reply. Was Edith objecting to come, and Herbert urging her to consent? Yes, this must be it, and he would see her, despite her unwillingness. Quick as thought, before Mrs.

Wynne could intercept him, he crossed the drawing-room, and threw open the folding-doors.

Arthur Herbert was in the middle of the next room, talking to three ladies, one of whom, dressed in deep mourning, had her hand upon his arm. They turned in surprise at the appearance of the unlooked-for intruder. One face, white as death itself, fixed its look upon Fleming's, with a painful eager gaze, but he did not see it. He saw no one but Edith, who moved out from the group, and went slowly towards the other door, which led out into the entrance hall. She was dressed as she had been in the morning when preparing for her marriage, except that she had laid aside her bridal wreath and veil.

"Edith," he said, following her with his eyes as she went to the door, "will you keep your promise?"

"I cannot keep it now," she said, with a flush on her cheek and a beam in her eye, such as it had not worn for months. "Thank God, I am free!"

"Edith!"

He moved a step forward after her as he spoke. He could hear the rustle of the silk she wore under the soft lace flounces, as she moved. But one glimpse only he caught of her white face, while the door opened and closed upon her. They never spoke to each other again.

One moment he stood irresolute, as though he contemplated following Edith, and the next he had turned away, and moving back a step or two, stood face to face with his wife.

There was a dread hush for an instant. Arthur and his mother were standing near Agnes, Mrs. Herbert with her hand still on the arm of her son, as she had been when Fleming entered, while behind him, looking through the folding doors, with eager, curious interest, were Mr. and Mrs. Wynne.

"Do you know me, George?" Agnes said at length, shrinking from the angry gleam in her husband's eye.

"Know you!" he said, bitterly, "I should think I do! So it was you who worked this business for me?"

Agnes stepped back towards Mrs. Herbert. Her husband's angry look frightened her, and Arthur interposed.

"She came to do good, and not evil, Mr. Fleming. She came to save, not to injure you."

"Save me from what? What danger was it in that she could save me from?"

"The danger of committing bigamy," Arthur answered, sternly. "You know the consequences of that, I suppose?"

"Nonsense, Mr. Herbert; you are laboring under a delusion," Fleming said, scornfully.

Agnes did not speak; she had gathered her child close to her breast, and suffered Mrs. Herbert to draw her down beside her on a sofa.

"It is better to discuss this matter without the ladies," Mr. Wynne suggested, in pity for Agnes's evident pain and nervousness.

"No," Mr. Fleming said, in his own determined way, from which Mr. Wynne knew of old there was no appeal. "No, Mr. Wynne. You are harboring the idea that I meant to have offered Miss Wynne the mockery of a marriage, when in reality I had a wife and child already, and could not marry her. Before I return to Griffin's Court, let me disabuse you of the idea that I contemplated this great wrong against your daughter. Had I married Edith to-day, she would have been my true and lawful wife."

They looked in amazement from one to the other. Agnes started up.

"Do you mean to deny your identity, George? Do you mean to deny that you married me in Vienna, the same night, and but an hour or two after you killed my father?"

"I just mean this, Agnes; that you could offer no impediment to my marriage with Miss Wynne."

"No impediment!" she repeated after him.

"No; you are not my wife."

"What am I then?" she exclaimed, with a look of mingled surprise and terror.

"What you please," he said, turning contemptuously from her.

"O George! you must be mad. I have my marriage certificate here."

"You may burn it, then. It will not make you mistress of Griffin's Court, nor your son heir to it either. Such a marriage as yours and mine, if marriage can call it, is not legal. You are a German Catholic, I am an English Protestant, and we were married by a priest."

"Shame, Mr. Fleming, shame! even supposing you are right in point of law, which I much doubt," Arthur cried, indignantly; while at the same time he felt a terrible fear that the marriage might be irregular, and that Fleming spoke the truth.

Agnes drew back, as if she had received a blow, to the shelter of Mrs. Herbert's protection, and laid her hand upon her shoulder.

"I do not wish to act in an ungenerous spirit," Fleming said, apparently recalled to a sense of his unseemly conduct by Arthur's cry of "shame!" "I will provide for you and for your child handsomely; more I cannot do. I cannot legalize a marriage which is not legal."

"I want nothing from you," Agnes exclaimed, raising her head, indignantly. "I will test this marriage to see if it be, as you say, informal; and if it be so, then God forgive you! The sin is yours, not mine."

"You will think better of it," he said, quietly, "when you come to your senses."

Agnes started to her feet.

"Leave me!" she exclaimed, pointing to the door;

"leave me, before I curse you for the wrong and ruin you would bring on me and my child."

"Leave her with the ladies, Mr. Fleming," Arthur said. "Do not torture her any further."

Agnes did test the marriage, and she found it to be what our readers have doubtless imagined already—a perfectly legal one. What was she to do then? Her friends—indignant beyond measure against Fleming—were for open war; but she—she loved him with a wife's love still—would take no steps against him.

"Perhaps he will return to me some day," she said, "when he has come to learn the great wrong that he has tried to do to me and to my child; at any rate, we will wait and see. For, O Edith! he has been cruel, I know; but I love him still."

Truly, Fleming was caught in the toils that his own evil passions had woven! The chastisement had begun!

## CHAPTER XLII

### REMORSE.

FEELINGS of tumultuous anger filled Fleming's breast as he drove back to Griffin's Court. The servant who opened the door on his return, saw the cloud on his master's brow, and drew back to let him pass on to the library. The man watched him stealthily and curiously, as he entered and closed the door. He heard the key turn in the lock as he went down the hall, and after that all was still.

Fleming sat there alone the whole day, guarding the fire and nursing his great wrath; blaming Agnes and forgetting to blame himself. He ignored, for the time, the grievous wrong she had suffered, and remembered only that through her untimely appearance he had lost Edith; lost her by less than an hour. This was the sore spot that galled him, and he sat glowering and frowning at the fire, chafing under the thought of it.

There may be dismay in the drawing-room, but there will be no dismay in the kitchen. There things go on like clock-work. The dinner must be cooked, even if it be sent down untasted; and thus it came to pass that at the usual hour for that meal at Griffin's Court, Fleming found himself seated alone at the dinner-table, partaking scantily, but mechanically, of the smoking dishes set before him.

The large room looked chill and stately as Fleming sat there solitary, and he regretted that his forgetfulness of his dinner had prevented his ordering it into the library. However, he did the next best thing, for when the cloth was removed, he desired his wine to be conveyed there, and once more took possession of his wide arm-chair before the fire. Free from the intrusion of servants, he sat moodily watching it as he had done all day; but after a little he took a book and tried to read. The effort did not succeed well, for he found it almost impossible to fix his mind so as to take in the sense, but it was so far of use that it lessened the tension and the bitterness of his mind somewhat, and gave it time to cool.

He sat up late that night, so late that all his household was asleep before he even thought of bed; but, notwithstanding, he was up betimes in the morning, and walking through the grounds long before the breakfast hour. After breakfast he went out again, giving directions to his steward respecting various things required about the place. That day and the next were similarly employed. The exercise and being out of doors appeared to bedevil him good, for as he sat by the library fire of an evening his thoughts were calmer and quieter than they had been during his first day of unreasoning anger.

Agnes, Mrs. Herbert, and Arthur were still at the Wynnes', as Edith and her mother had pressed them to stay a few days longer. Edith was a great comfort to Agnes; her stronger mind peculiarly fitting her to be a sympathizer with Agnes's weak but most gentle nature, which had learned to forgive Edith her unintentional interference with Fleming's love. And so it came to pass that those two—the one the victim, and the other almost the victim, of the same man's love—grew to hold together firmly, the one supporting while the other leaned.

Fleming knew Agnes was still at the Wynnes'. He learned it casually from the steward, who, perhaps, shrewdly suspecting his master would not be averse to hear how things were going on in that direction, without mentioning names, gave the information by saying, "that company was staying at the Park." Fleming made no answer, but noted it quietly, and soon afterwards went indoors.

There was a gradual change at work within him, a change that people round him failed to discern through the stolid exterior he presented to their gaze. In that gradual change all the good in his nature was coming up, and all the evil going down. No irritating interference from Mr. Wynne or Arthur Herbert, in behalf of Agnes, had come to him, as he at first imagined it would. He was prepared to fight against his own memory of all she had been. Her long-suffering patience under his unkindness; her forgiveness of her father's death the night they had parted in Paris, when perhaps he had felt more for her than in all the months preceding it, although still resolved to consummate the bitter wrong he had conceived; it all came surging up now, in his lonely hours, and pleaded in her behalf. Again these thoughts were battled with, and banished, only to return with stronger force; and then came the knowledge that she was yet at Grace Park.

Does the reader remember the writing-desk that stood on the library-table at Griffin's Court, in which Fleming was rummaging at the moment when he

became cognizant of the fact that Ralph Herbert, and not Mr. Wynne, was Mr. Ward's client, on that memorable day, a little preceding Ralph's death, when Mr. Ward paid his first and last visit there? This desk contained multifarious papers, some of them having reference to the Griffin's Court estate, some of them memoranda concerning that old mortgage on Grace Park, and others letters of business; while a few, two or three only, were letters of a different kind, being from Agnes during some of Fleming's absences in England. Most of her letters had been destroyed, but somehow these few remained—why, Fleming could scarcely tell. One of them, written in uncertain characters, with fingers that trembled sorely, told the, to her, joyous news of her boy's birth, and brought Fleming away on that sudden, hurried journey the morning after the dinner-party at Grace Park. Through this mass of papers, Fleming was rummaging for something that would not come to hand, and in displacing a packet of letters in his search, Agnes's few forgotten epistles came in view. The one telling of George's birth came first; he recognized it, and drawing nearer the lamp, read a few lines, then he threw it down. It was out of sight, but another lay under his hand, speaking of her silently. As he tried to put it, too, away, he felt something thick inside the envelope, which induced him, after flinging it aside, to take it up again and examine the contents. This letter had come during the anxious time of Walker's trial; it had been, consequently, hastily read, and never answered. Forgotten and neglected, the contents met his eye now—a tiny lock of a child's hair, black as his own, and twisted by its mother's fingers into a little curl.

He laid it down upon the open letter, and sat looking at it; looking at it, and thinking of the young mother as he had borne her, way from home, in her sunny girlhood, and thinking of her now as a wife, and yet no wife, smarting under the agony of that false marriage. His child, and hers, was speaking to him through that tiny curl, pleading for the place from which he had cast it, pleading for the name which he had taken away. He sat still, looking at the hair. The past was irrevocable, but could tardy justice wipe out the sin? He got up, and walked about the room for long minutes without ceasing, and then sat down again, but the burden of his thoughts still was, Will tardy justice wipe out the sin? Solitude and disappointment were doing their work. His plans failing so utterly, proving themselves so futile, whispered of retribution and of judgment, and the man's iron nature was giving way. Hence that vain trust that a late justice would atone for the past.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### OVERTURES OF PEACE.

THE folding-doors which divided the front from the back drawing-room at Grace Park were thrown open, making the two into one long, wide room. Near the window in the back drawing-room, Arthur Herbert sat reading the morning paper, lounging at his ease in a comfortably cushioned arm-chair; while in the front room, likewise near the window, and quite in Arthur's view, Edith was sitting reading a letter.

Before the house, leisurely walking up, and down, leading his horse by the bridle, was a groom, in the Griffin's Court livery, who had brought the note. What could Mr. Fleming have to say to her now? Edith thought, as half-hesitating, half-curious, she broke the seal. A petition for pardon, or for peace between them, a vow of unaltered love, an allusion to the relation in which they had so lately stood to each other, or a prayer for a renewal of it? The letter contained none of these. It did not begin in the familiar terms of "Dear Edith," which he had once been privileged to address her with, or the colder formality of "Dear Miss Wynne," but ran simply thus:

"Will you be the bearer of a message from me to Agnes, as I fear the shock a sudden communication might cause her, and I know you will tell her what I want conveyed to her as gently as may be? Ask her could she so far forget everything as to see me again. Say to her that, if she consents to do so, I will call to-morrow at Grace Park about twelve o'clock, if you have no objection, and that I am willing, as far as in me lies, to atone for the past, both to her and our child. Will you forgive my troubling you to act in this matter? But I am sure you will do what you can for her sake, if not for mine. Yours ever,

"GEORGE FLEMING."

Edith read the letter again, and yet again, before her surprise allowed her fully to understand it. Presently she called Arthur Herbert from the other room, and he came with his newspaper in his hand.

"Sit by me while you read this," she said, giving him Fleming's note, and at the same time making room for him on her small, cosy sofa; "and give me your advice as to what I had best do."

Like Edith, Arthur read the letter twice, and then laid it down on a table near them.

"I cannot understand that man," he said, after a moment's thought. "He is a riddle beyond my reaching. Can he have found out the flaw in his plot, as we have?"

"Ah, well, but your advice, Arthur?" Edith asked, keeping him to the point. "What am I to do?"

"There is but one thing for you to do," he said. "Act as Mr. Fleming wishes you, for Agnes's sake. Get him here, and then we can do with him as we think best."



"Imputed wrote to me, must I not? The groom is waiting to take back my answer."

"Of course you must, Edith. Just tell him you will speak to Agnes, and let him know the result."

She fiddled with her watch-chain a moment in silence.

"I do not like writing to Mr. Fleming, Arthur; indeed, I do not," she said, at length.

"Nonsense, Edith; a line will do it."

"What shall I say, then?—tell me what to say," she asked, pleadingly.

She had got a way of leaning upon him that Arthur liked amazingly, and he laughed as he rose from the sofa, and drawing her after him by the hand, led her to a table, where her writing-desk stood.

"Come, we will concoct it together," he said, as he put her into a chair. And so the note was written—a little tiny note, only containing two or three lines—with which the groom rode away to Griffin's Court.

When the man reached home his master was standing on the hall door steps, with the post bag in his hand, which he had just taken from the post-boy, who had brought the letters from Abbotsville that came by the mid-day post. Dismounting and touching his hat, he handed Fleming the letter he had brought from Grace Park, and then rode round to the stables. Fleming crossed the hall to the library, reading it as he went, and then laying it on the table, opened the bag which he still held in his hand. Almost mechanically he tossed over the letters it contained, all the while thinking of Edith's note. One of them dropped out and lay beside it, and when Fleming had glanced at the others he took this one up. He stood a moment looking at it, for he knew the hand well, and then opening it also, began to read.

It was from Walker. With the first part of it we have nothing to do; it merely contained something touching a matter of business, the paying off of Horner's bond, about which he and Mr. Fleming spoke the first night we looked in upon them in the library at Griffin's Court; but when that was disposed of, Walker went on to say:

"How soon am I to go back to Griffin's Court? Now that Miss Wynne is not to be mistress there, I do not choose to remain in transportation here, and we may as well take up house together again. Remember, we must both sail in future in the same boat. I am safe in it, but you are not. So keep this in mind, and let me know when I am to go down. I'll expect to hear in a day or two."

Fleming read the letter, and doubling it up hard in his hand, walked about the room. After a turn or two, he went over to the fire and threw it in. He watched it curling, and blazing, and then vanishing in red sparks and black charred ashes. "I am safe, but you are not." The words came back to him again and again; he seemed to see them standing out and forming once more on the blackened mass of burned paper that lay on the top of the fire. He took up the poker, and dashed it through it, mingling it with the red coals. "I am safe, but you are not." The words were a covert threat. Did they allude to Walker's acquittal of Ralph's murder, and Fleming's untried guilt? Fleming knew that they did.

Something must be done. He must get this man under his own eye, and keep him there; but not at Griffin's Court. He stood awhile leaning on the mantelpiece thinking, and then taking up his hat, left the house, carrying Edith's note with him. The library seemed stifling, and the air would be freer out of doors.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### FORGIVENESS.

EDITH stood with Agnes at the window of her dressing-room, which looked out upon the lawn of Grace Park, and over the wood, where the Griffin Court chimneys were just discernible above the trees. Edith's mind was full of how she could best break the good news of Fleming's intentions to her, while Agnes's mind was full of her husband.

"Ah!" Agnes said, looking away towards Griffin's Court; "I believe I should love to stay here, in place of going to Marston Grange with Mrs. Herbert. Is it not ungrateful of me, after all her kindness to me?"

Edith smiled. "Stay here, then, Agnes, as long as you like, unless you get a home you love better; and then I will let you go."

"Ah, I shall never get a home that I can love," she said, sighing lightly, a half-subdued sigh; "all that is over now."

"Who knows," Edith said, hopefully, "but that Mr. Fleming may ride over some day, and beg you to forget the past? If he did, Agnes, what would you say to him?"

A little, faint pink flush came to her cheek, and she turned her pretty blue eyes from the window to Edith's face, as she said, hesitatingly:

"If he did, I am afraid I should forgive him."

"Afraid, Agnes! Why do you say afraid?"

"O, because Arthur Herbert says he ought never to be forgiven, and Mrs. Herbert says so too."

"Never mind Arthur; he was angry when he said that, probably, and so was Mrs. Herbert."

The flush grew deeper on Agnes's cheek, and spread over her entire face, dyeing it crimson.

"He is too angry with me to come again," she said. "I have lost him. I lost him on that day I prevented him from marrying you."

"O, but you may not have lost him; you will not lose him; he will come to you again."

"No, never, ever!"

"O but he will. Suppose I were a prophetess, and prophesied that he would come, and that he did come; what would you say then?"

A light gleamed in Agnes's eye.

"What do you mean? You mean something, Edith," she exclaimed, catching the expression of Edith's face. "O, tell me what it is!"

"Sit here, then, and I will," she answered, placing herself on a sofa that stood near the window; and drawing Agnes down beside her, she told her, as gently as might be, the contents of Fleming's note, and then, when the first nervous flush of surprise was over, gave it to her to read.

"Are you afraid you will forgive him now, Agnes, dear?" she asked as she finished it.

"O no, not afraid, Edith," Agnes answered, "but sure that I will."

"What shall I say to him when I write? tell me what to say?"

The glow was in Agnes's face again, on neck, and cheek, and brow, but not the glow of pain that had rushed over her a minute since, and she answered, with a fuller beam of light in her eye, "Tell him to come."

"Tell him to come!" The words went in Edith's letter that night to Fleming as they fell from Agnes's lips. "Tell him to come!" And he came.

When Fleming reached Grace Park a servant showed him into the room where Agnes was waiting for him. He entered it with a scarcely perceptible hesitation, closing the door after him, and he stood once more face to face with the woman he had so grievously wronged. Agnes was standing in the middle of the room, holding Georgie by the hand. She made a hasty, nervous step forward to meet him, and he caught her in his arms to save her from falling.

"Am I forgiven, Agnes?" he asked, as she clung to him, and he stooped to kiss her forehead.

"Forgiven?—O yes!" she said.

Fleming looked at her a moment, and then he sighed, and drew her away to a sofa, with little Georgie clinging to her dress. How mighty must be the strength of that love which could forgive such faults as his.

As Agnes suffered Fleming to place her on the sofa and seat himself beside her, she took up the child and put him on his father's knee.

"Do you not remember papa, darling?" she whispered; "he has come back to mama and Georgie."

The little fellow did remember him, and put up his lips for a kiss. Fleming kissed him, and still holding him on his knee, went on talking to Agnes.

"Miss Wynne told you everything, I suppose?" he asked. "Did she show you my letter?"

"Yes," Agnes answered; "she explained all to me."

"She told you that I was desirous of repairing the past by marrying you now, did she not?"

"She said that you wanted to marry me over again, George."

"Yes, yes," he said, with a softened voice; "you are right. I did marry you before; and to you, at least, that marriage vow was holy."

"Yes," she answered, reverently; "and it should have been so to you, too."

"Would that it had been, I can say now," he replied.

"Had you only known at the time how holy it really was, you would not have suffered as you have done since, George."

He started back, and stared at her in blank wonderment.

"What do you mean, Agnes?"

"I mean this—that you and I were as truly married then, as though we had stood side by side in an English church."

"How do you know this?"

"Ever since that day, when I came here first, Arthur has been investigating the point. Our marriage was legal, after all, he says. I was waiting, George, in full belief that you would come back to me some day before long."

Fleming's manly face worked fearfully with the agony of his conflicting emotions. At last he spoke:

"Come to me, Agnes—wife—come!" was all that he could say. And she came.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE ATONEMENT.

THREE weeks after the last scene, a little group was assembled in the drawing-room at Griffin's Court, to witness Agnes's welcome to her husband's home.

Fleming had arranged that Agnes should at once take possession of Griffin's Court, and she looked forward hopefully to the future. But he himself was distrustful and silent, now and then endeavoring to rouse himself and converse with his guests, who remained to partake of a light supper.

How sorely our sins sting us sometimes! and Fleming's were stinging him then. To Agnes he had made atonement; but what atonement could bring the dead to life, and so restore to Edith her slain lover? For Fleming's innocent heart knew, what others only suspected, that his brain had planned the deed that Walker's hand executed. When once the gates of his conscience were opened to his wrong against Agnes, that mightier wrong rose likewise to upbraid him; and heart and brain almost failed him in his sharp agony.

Agnes watched his face anxiously, as by turns lounded, and he endeavored to cast off the trouble. At last, to her infinite relief, the guests rose to take their leave. She went up stairs with Mrs. Wynne, to get on her bonnet and cloak, and thence accompanied her into the hall, where she bade her good night, with a thousand charges to have Georgie over early to Griffin's Court, whither it was arranged he and his nurse were to be transferred next day. After Mrs. Wynne and her husband had left, she returned to the drawing-room to wait for Fleming, who was proposing to settle a difficulty about Mr. Howard's horse not having come round, by their going to the stables to look after it themselves. She was not more than a minute or so in the room, when she heard her husband's step crossing the hall again, and coming towards the drawing-room; in another moment he had opened the door and entered. She was surprised to see him back so soon; and as he came near her she thought there was something odd in his manner. He was sitting on a sofa close to the fire, but he did not attempt to take a seat beside her, standing while he spoke.

"I came back for a moment from Mr. Howard," he said, hesitatingly, "just to say a word."

"Would it not have done when he was gone?" he asked, wonderingly; "surely you will not be long away with him."

"No," he answered, slowly; "it is not that exactly; but I came to ask you this—is the atonement I have offered you sufficient to erase the past? Do you forgive me for it all, Agnes?"

"Yes, yes!" she said, eagerly, holding out her hands, which he took in his. "I forgive you for everything, and I would fain see you forgive yourself."

This was what she thought oppressed him: he was not right in his own eyes yet. He held her hand in one of his, and laid the other on her head.

"Do you remember the scapegoat of the old law, driven into the wilderness with the sins of the people on its head?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"Well, if I, like the scapegoat, went into the wilderness, not with the crimes of the people, but my own upon my head, should I bear your forgiveness for my sins against you with me?"

"Surely, surely!" she said. "But what is it that you mean?"

It was a new riddle to her, which he did not stop to explain; but stooping and kissing first her forehead and then her lips, left her hastily, and returned to his guest, while she sat wondering and watching until he should come back.

Half an hour passed, and then another; still he did not come. Mr. Howard had gone long since; she had heard his horse's steps on the gravel as he passed the window. Where could Fleming be? She rang to inquire of the servants had they seen their master, but they had not. Some of them hurried off to look in the library, and elsewhere through the house, but in vain. Agnes was beginning to feel an undefined alarm, and the servants looked at one another in doubt, but could suggest nothing. She herself remembered that he had been to the stable, and in her anxiety, went to the yard, with the old butler for a guide. Everything was still, the stable door was shut and locked, and no one was to be seen. A light, however, was gleaming from the windows of one of the out-offices where the outdoor servants slept, and by Agnes's directions the man knocked at the door. A moment's conversation with whoever answered the summons resulted in the groom, who had saddled Mr. Howard's horse, hurrying on his coat, and coming into the yard, followed at a distance by two or three of the other men. None of them had seen their master except this man; and to Agnes's nervous questioning he even could give but little satisfaction. He remembered that the horse was not ready when Mr. Howard and Mr. Fleming came, and that while they waited for it, Mr. Howard walked up and down the yard, and his master returned to the house. On his coming back into the yard again the horse was standing there, and Mr. Howard in the act of mounting. As soon as he had seated himself in the saddle, he shook hands with Mr. Fleming, who stood watching him as he rode to the gate, which the groom had hastened to open for him to ride through. As he closed it after him and locked it, he remembered seeing his master going towards the back entrance to the house, as if returning in that way, as he had come out by it; but that instead of doing so, he turned off at the side, and went through a small door that led out into the lawn, and thence, as the man supposed, let himself into the house by a latch-key.

Agnes stood bewildered, and the man stood looking at her. Where was Fleming going? They went out into the lawn, and through the wood with lanterns, searching, and shouting his name, but all in vain; the echo of their own voices only met their ears. Agnes threw a shawl round her shoulders, and accompanied by the housekeeper, made her way across the lawn to the front lodge, and waked up the lodge-keeper, but he knew nothing of Fleming, having closed the gate behind Mr. Howard, and returned to bed immediately. The night waned away, and morning broke over the scene, and by daylight a fresh search was instituted, but all to no effect. Agnes was nervous and ill from terror, anxiety, and exertion; and at daybreak a hurried message was despatched to Grace Park, carrying consternation and astonishment thither likewise, and causing its inmates to hurry off to Griffin's court with all possible speed.

They found Agnes in the drawing-room, where Fleming had parted from her the night before, white and terrified. They did everything they could to soothe and quiet her; but she had got an idea in her head that Fleming had destroyed himself, and she could not be still. Every step she heard in the hall, every tone that reached her through the house, she fancied was that of some one who had found his body, and that they were coming to tell her of it. Edith strove to calm her as best she might; she attended to her more even than to Mrs. Herbert or Mrs. Wynne. Edith's influence had grown strong upon her during her stay at Grace Park, but its utmost power could not entirely quiet her now. Arthur Herbert's first act on hearing Agnes's account of what had occurred after the party broke up the night before—Fleming's strange manner and strange words—was to hurry to the stable-yard and question the groom; but he could learn nothing fresh, and he determined to try if he could discover anything at Abbotsville. Two horses were speedily saddled by his order, one for himself and one for the groom; and then, after hurrying in doors to assure Agnes that he would do his utmost to trace her husband, and if he got a trace of him would lose no time in following it up, he galloped off to the village.

He went first to the railway station. It was early yet, and the townspeople were scarcely a stir. The station-master, however, had just entered the station, and having taken his place in the box, was rubbing his half-opened eyes by the light of a single jet of gas, as the little window admitted the morning light but sparingly. Arthur got an unexpected trace of Fleming here. He had taken a first-class ticket to W— by the last train the night before, and the station-master had observed, as he gave it, that his manner was anxious and rather hurried, which was an unusual circumstance with Mr. Fleming. A few pencilled lines conveyed this intelligence back by the groom to Agnes, and relieved her mind of that terrible fear. At W— Arthur had more difficulty in following up the clue, as the station-master there had no recollection of any one like Fleming having taken a ticket for London; for that, Arthur was convinced, was his destination. Two gentlemen, one of whom answered that description, had got tickets, but not one. This for a while puzzled Arthur, and he lost a train by it; but presently it occurred to him that perhaps the second person was Walker. He went back to the station to inquire, and on further questioning became convinced that he was right. A porter remembered the one coming down from London during the day before, and recognized him again on the platform that morning; so it became evident they had met, slept at W—, and gone by the first train to London in the morning. Thither Arthur followed, having first written to Agnes, and sent a line to Edith—why he did not know exactly, for the note to Agnes was sufficient; but he had a vague notion she might like him to show he remembered her, as he was bound to do by that brotherly compact. This done, he started immediately for London, where he arrived late at night; and early the following day he went direct to Fleming's solicitor, Mr. Graves, who listened in some surprise to his statement respecting him.

"That he is in London, or was in London," he said, "I am assured of, for I had a letter from him an hour ago, bearing the London postmark, and dated yesterday."

He took it up from amongst his morning's correspondence, and handed it to Arthur. It bore no address, and contained only a few lines, requesting Mr. Graves at once to register a deed to which he alluded, if he had not done so already.

"This deed I had registered before he wrote," Mr. Graves observed. "It settles the whole of the Griffin's Court estate on Mrs. Fleming's son, making her the sole guardian of him and his property, reserving the interest of the mortgage on Grace Park for her own use, besides the interest of a considerable sum in the Three per Cent. Consols. The deed is consequently in force this moment, and it disposes of everything except a sum of £30,000, which he sold out of the funds, and left lying at his banker's the last time I saw him, when he came to London to sign that deed."

That he was gone altogether, gone deliberately, and with forethought, Arthur saw now; and after some further consultation, he and Mr. Graves drove to the banker's, where they learned that Fleming had been the previous day, accompanied by Walker, and had drawn out the money, but given no explanation either of his whereabouts or his intentions.

Here all certainty respecting him ended, and for days Arthur was at fault. Fleming had not been at his usual hotel in Jermyn street, nor at any hotel, as far as Arthur could discover after three days' search. He wrote constantly to Griffin's Court, where Edith still remained with Agnes, but his letters brought scanty comfort. "He is gone; I shall never see him again," Agnes kept repeating forever, and Edith's task of comforter was a heavy one.

"I should not wonder if he were gone abroad," Mr. Graves observed, the next time Arthur called on him to tell him of his vain search.

"Where to? To France?" Arthur asked.

"No, no, that would not suit him in his present frame of mind. Most likely to Australia or New Zealand. Suppose you try the shipping-offices."

The shipping-offices Arthur did try, but with no certain result. It was spring time, and many vessels were going to all parts of the world. No such names as Fleming and Walker were on any of the books, but men answering the description had gone in this vessel or that. To New Zealand by the *Result*, to Australia by the *Bold Brion*, and so on. Nothing positive, only mere doubts every step. When he thought he had got a clue, the appearance of the passengers indicated varied from that first given, to taller or shorter, fairer or darker. The *Stars and Stripes*, an American vessel, with an American captain and an

American crew, bound for the South, was said to have received two such men on board as Arthur sought for, but this, too, could not be made clear, and he gave up the search in despair.

Fleming was gone unquestionably, and Agnes was right—she should never see him again. But where had he gone? and why was this a burden to him, and the quiet of home irksome? Had he gone to seek adventure or excitement elsewhere, with his eye still upon the man who held his life in his hand? Yet where had he gone, and why? Had he, to use his own words, fled away into the wilderness like the scapegoat, with the sins, not of the people, but his own, upon his head?

## CHAPTER XLV.

### EDITH'S WEDDING.

RATHER more than a year has passed away since the events related in my last chapter. Summer is bright over Grace Park and Griffin's Court, their lawns are rich with grassy verdure, and the early May sunbeams are shining on the fields and sloping uplands, far across which, coming on the morning air, sounded the clear chimes of the joy-bells of Abbotsville Church.

It is Edith's wedding morning, and, as the reader perhaps long ago surmised would be the case, Arthur Herbert is the bridegroom. He did not violently or suddenly displace her first strong love for Ralph; but mellowed and softened it, until almost unconsciously her faith to the dead brother became mingled with love for the living one. The memory of Ralph was not lost yet, but moulded and blended with the thought of Arthur, until they seemed almost a part of the same thing. He had his brother's eye, his brother's smile, and his winning, harmless gayety; but along with these he had the stamp of a firmer mind, that Edith's increased years and experience taught her to appreciate. Arthur had grown to love her, as she loved him, through those weeks of constant intercourse at Grace Park; but, like himself, unconsciously, till the time came when the claim of a brother was exchanged for that of a lover and a husband. Mrs. Wynne had seen it gently growing, but wisely kept silence, and let things take their course—a matter in which it would be best if a hundred meddling mothers, and meddling relatives generally, would follow her example: probably, they may find Mrs. Wynne a very common-place person as she appears in my pages; but nevertheless, she has fulfilled a woman's best and truest mission, by making a good wife and a good mother.

Within the church at Abbotsville, on that pleasant summer morning, a gay party was assembled. Mr. and Mrs. Wynne were looking quite young again, and happy in Edith's happiness. Mr. Stanley of Donnington and his young Scotch wife were of the party—a pretty, fresh, fair-haired Highland girl, whom he had met when in Scotland for the shooting the previous season, and married in spite of his mother (I am ashamed to tell it, but it is the truth), who persisted in saying he had "picked her up" in Scotland, merely because she had no "tocher;" although her old blood counted far higher than that of the Stanleys of Donnington, if her purse were less strong than theirs. Mrs. Stanley and her pretty daughter were also amongst the guests. Miss Stanley was Grace Stanley still, and only half liked her brother's jesting observation, that although the same age as Edith, Edith had managed to win three husbands, while she had not caught one. Mrs. Herbert, Agnes Fleming, of Griffin's Court, and little George—then three years old, and tall of his age—were the only other guests worth mentioning. Agnes looked older and thinner than when we saw her last, but time has softened the blow of Fleming's absence. No trace of him whatever has been discovered, not a line, not a word has ever reached her from him; and she had even ceased to hope for his return, and centred all her love and care upon her son.

The bells are still pealing joyously, and, as the party issues from the church, the school-girls from the village school, dressed in white muslin, smiling and curtsying, throw flowers before the bride and bridegroom as they pass on down the little avenue to the gate, where their wedding awaits them, and amidst cheers and blessings from Mrs. Wynne's tenantry, they are driven back to Grace Park, followed speedily by the wedding guests. And so, while the sky is clear, the sun shining cheerily, and the church bells yet pealing their merry chimes, I will drop the curtain and retire, leaving the guests and their entertainers to enjoy the breakfast prepared for them, and drink the health of the bride and bridegroom in peace.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### RETRIBUTION.

Two years after Edith's marriage, when an heir had been born to the united properties of Grace Park and Marston Grange (for Arthur redeemed that vexatious mortgage, whose existence had cost Edith so much sorrow), a paragraph, copied into one of our papers from an American journal, caught Arthur's eye one morning after breakfast. It ran thus:

"The neighborhood of —, in South Carolina, has been thrown into a state of horror by a most foul murder committed by an overseer named Walker, on the person of his master, a large slave-holder and cotton-planter. This gentleman, whose name was George, came from England to South America, about three years ago, and bought the estate in question, which, with all the hands upon it, was then in the market. Although a dark, stern-looking man, and

rather silent and uncommunicative, he was generally liked, being humane to his slaves, generous and open-handed to all the local charities, and a most inoffensive neighbor. The overseer, on the other hand, who was not an American born, but accompanied Mr. George from England, was, we understand, a morose, sullen, severe man; and we believe it was a quarrel arising out of some unwonted cruelty to a favorite groom of Mr. George's, that caused, first, the altercation, and then the sudden blow, which cost that gentleman his life. The crime, we learn, met with a speedy and just retribution at the hands of a mob, who dragged the murderer from the custody of the local authorities, and lynched him on the spot where his crime was committed."

Arthur looked at the paper again, and read over the paragraph once more. A hazy suspicion was dawning upon him. Fleming's Christian name was George—could it be he? The passengers by the American ship had gone to a Southern port. Could they be Fleming and Walker? He called Edith from the other room; she came, and leaning over his shoulder read the news.

"Is it Fleming, Edie, do you think it is Fleming?" Arthur asked, when she had done. He looked up as he spoke, and he saw that she had turned very pale.

"Put the paper away," she whispered—"destroy it; Agnes must never see it." And then she added, gliding her arm round his neck, "Did I not tell you once, Arthur, that whatever is, is best? Do you remember who it is who says, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord?'"

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Flag of Our Union (1854-1870); Sep 9, 1865; 20, 36; American Periodicals  
pg. 569

He drew out a little box from his pocket, containing a beautifully worked bracelet, which he tried to fasten on her wrist.

"You are very provoking," she said, pettishly, drawing away her arm. "I thought you were going to tell me something, and you are only laughing at me."

"Nonsense, Agnes; take the bracelet, and let me have some supper."

She suffered him to put it on her arm this time, admiring the glitter of its gold and jewels with girlish delight, and then rang the bell for supper. When they had done, she pushed away the tray and sat down by him once more, before the warm fire.

"I am so glad you are come back. I was so lonely in your absence. But you will not leave me again, will you?"

"I cannot promise that, but I shall not leave you for many months to come—not until May or June, perhaps; and then I must go again for a little while."

"Well, that is a long way off. But why must you go away? Is it on business connected with what you went about this time?"

"Partly."

"Will you answer me one question—just one question, George?"

"Are you at your catechism again?" he said, impatiently.

"Only this one question!" she pleaded.

"What is it?"

"Did you see your father?"

A shadow came over his face, but it was not anger; it was too solemn for that.

"I did," he said.

"Did you meet as friends?" she asked, anxiously, forgetful of her promise only to ask one question.

"No."

"In anger, then?"

"No."

"And our marriage, George," she said, eagerly; "did you breathe even a hint of it to him?"

"I did not. The time has gone by for that, Agnes; I cannot tell him now."

There was a momentary pause, and then he said, in an altered tone:

"It is getting late, and I am very tired. Had we not better go to rest?"

She did not reply, but lighting her candle at the lamp, went out in silence.

CHAPTER XV.  
THE YOUNG MOTHER.

Her husband was back again, and that seemed enough for Agnes. Health came back to her frame, and light to her eye; and she was once more able to enjoy her usual drives and walks. Her husband was kind to her still—not with the affection of their early married days, before this weary business, whatever it was, had come to part them—but with a quiet kindness which left her nothing to complain of. Yet there was a want through it all the time—a want, and she felt it. O, that hungering of the heart for one of the thousand signs by which she had traced his love for her in the bygone days! The sudden touch of his hand, as he used to lay it on her head or shoulder; the wandering eye, following her round the room; the numberless little gifts he used to bring her, every one of which she welcomed as a mute evidence of how she filled his thoughts. Yet, after all, what was it? Only the quiet change which comes always when the lover's passionate ardor dies away in the calm, and, perhaps, more enduring love of the husband. Yes, that was all, Agnes told herself a hundred times a day; yet the assurance did not still the longing for that vanished fervor, which her heart told her would come back to her never more.

"George," Agnes said to him one evening, when they were sitting as usual in the drawing-room, she in her easy chair, with her baby in her lap, and Villaret opposite to her near the window, "George, look at baby; just watch how he follows and grasps my chain when I draw it from him."

She pulled the chain from the little fingers that clutched it; but the child put out his hand and caught it again.

"I wonder was I in such tender hands at his age?" he said, without noticing her remark. "I wonder what sort of woman my mother was?"

"Why, did you never see her?"

"Never to remember her. She died when I was very young."

"What did she die of?"

"Of what hundreds of women die of," he said, gloomily; "of what you may die of, perhaps—harsh treatment and a broken heart."

"O, don't say that!" she said, shuddering; "you make me feel afraid."

He made no reply.

"But your mother," she said again, after a pause.

"Who treated her harshly—your father?"

"Don't speak to me of my father," he said, impatiently.

"Would baby be strong enough to travel now, George?" she asked at length, looking up at her husband.

"Strong enough? Yes, to be sure. He is a fine, manly little fellow. Why do you wish for a change? Where do you wish to go to?"

"Well, I was thinking of something," she answered, while a flush came to her cheek. "I was thinking of a promise you made me last year, to take me to England, to see our old home at Marston."

"That promise was only conditional, Agnes," he said. "I told you I would try; but its fulfillment is more impossible now than then."

"Why?" she asked.

"Somehow, you are always touching on unpleasant themes, Agnes. You don't mean to do it, I know, but you do, nevertheless," he answered. "Since I made that half promise last year, Marston has become an unpleasant place to me, and I cannot go there now."

"Why, George? won't you tell me why?"

He hesitated. What should he say to her?

"Why, George?" she repeated, seeing him pause.

"How you do go on repeating your questions, Agnes!" he said. "And after all, I have nothing to tell you, except that I lost a dear friend of mine near Marston while I was away, and I should not like to go there now; so just put it out of your head altogether."

"Must I see it—never? O George!"

"Never with me," he said. "If you like to travel on your own account, you can."

"There, now, don't be angry. I'll give it up, only don't be angry."

"I am not angry. I don't know what is the matter with me, but I feel in a state of excitement. I should like change, movement, anything. I cannot sit here day by day, and think."

"Then, come away; we will go somewhere for a month or so; you will be better when you come back. Would you like it?"

"O yes, very much," he said, eagerly catching at the suggestion.

"Where would you like us to go? To Italy or"—she paused—"to Germany?" Her heart was in Germany yet.

"Not to Germany, certainly. You forget I cannot go there; but we will go to Italy. I have a commission from an English friend to buy pictures for him; and by going to Italy, we can combine business and pleasure."

Agnes looked up and smiled.

"I am glad to hear of this picture commission, George. After all, there is nothing like employment for killing care."

"Yes," he answered; "it chases thought."

He rose and looked out of the window into the street, where the lamps were already lighted. Agnes got up quietly. Baby was asleep, and laying him down on the sofa, she stole softly over to her husband, and twined her arm within his.

"O, George, darling," she whispered, in low, tender tones, "what is this sorrow or anxiety that has risen up to trouble you? Make it lighter, dearest, by laying half the burden on me. Only confide in me, and I will comfort you."

Confide in her! The words stung him, O! so sorely. He looked out upon the gleaming lamplight shining over the still white pavement, but he did not speak. Confide in her he dare not.

"George, dear," she said again, after waiting in vain for a reply, "this pain and care, whatever it is, is too much for you. Divide it, then, with me, and see how bravely we will carry it together."

"Agnes, don't ask me. I cannot, must not tell you now."

He spoke in a subdued voice; but although he denied her request, he still let her arm rest in his.

"Listen to me, George," he said, again. "Is this trouble connected with me?"

She felt the arm she held move nervously.

"Partly," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

"I think I can guess it. Now may I say something?"

"Yes, yes; anything you like," he said.

"I think, I am almost sure, that this marriage of ours is troubling you, George; that it is separating you from your father and your friends; and I was going to say that if it be so, and that parting from me for a little while would be wise, I could go away and leave you free, until your father might receive us both in peace."

"No, no; that can never be."

"Yes, but it might. O, George dear, I would do anything in the world to see you as you were when I knew you first. What has come to you of late? Tell me, O, tell me!"

"There, do not press me, Agnes," he said. "I can't tell you now."

"Why?" she asked.

"For goodness' sake!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "drop that eternal 'why.' And then, as if ashamed of his brusqueness, he softened his tone and added, "If it would do any good, I would answer all your questions; but it really cannot, and it only vexes and worries me to talk of these things."

"Well, then, I will not ask you; but just tell me this. Are you afraid of your father discovering our marriage? If so, I am willing to go back to Germany, back to my father if you so desire it, till the danger passes away. He would receive me when he saw me, I know he would, though he will not write."

He moved away from the window and sat down. She stood before him, waiting his reply. He sat looking at her a moment, and then taking both her hands in his, while his face wore a mask of tenderness, more affected than real, he said:

"Agnes, you are too good to have joined your fate with such as I am. You cannot know how I am suffering, how I am tempted. You cannot, and you must not know it."

"We will talk no more of it," she said, gently disengaging one of her hands, and putting her arm round his neck. "Let us talk of something else."

She drew him over against her side, and commenced planning their excursion. He seemed to listen to her, throwing in a word now and then; but his thoughts were far away all the time, wandering longingly over forbidden ground.

CHAPTER XVI.  
A SECRET BETRAYED.

WINTER had set in, and the oaks and limes were bare round Griffin's Court. The cold December wind was sweeping in cutting blasts about the old house, and a thick white frost was hanging upon the park trees, and spread over the lawn, making the crisp grass crackle beneath the foot, while from the house itself came the sounds of revelry and music. If there was cold and darkness without, blazing lights and blazing fires banished all cold and darkness from within. It was Christmas night, and Mr. Fleming had determined that it should be a night of joy and gladness, a night of mirth and feasting within the old halls of Griffin's Court.

Carriage after carriage had rolled up the avenue, the gleam of their lamps shining upon the frosted gravel walk as they drew up before the door with the rapid sweeping turn coachmen love to exhibit. All the youth, all the beauty, all the white shoulders and bright eyes which could be assembled for miles round had come, accompanied by sedate mammas and sober papas, to enjoy the profuse hospitality prepared for them.

Edith knew that all this gay scene had been arranged for her—knew it, and felt proud of it, as any woman would have done in her place. The little feminine vanity which follows even the fairest and the best of her sex, was not denied to her; and, after all, what would they be without it? How many of their charms would vanish with the absence of the pretty coquettish graces they love to indulge in—the smiles, the light jest or laughter, which it is pleasant to turn to sometimes, to lighten the heavy load of life! Are men better, or wiser, or happier, who are above enjoying such gentle companionship? Is the child who will not vary the discipline of the school-room by chasing a butterfly, half as contented, do you think, as he who loves flowers and butterflies and studies too?

Edith, then, like all true women, was faithful to her natural instincts—gay and cheerful in her light-heartedness; a little bit tainted, as I have said, by womanly vanity; a little bit proudly conscious of her exceeding beauty, and her power to please; while, as is the case with all true women, below the surface lay chords of a deeper tone—a kind, loving heart, warm, and true, and tender, capable, when strongly stirred, of devotion or sacrifice in the cause of those she loved. Hers were lips that could cheer with smiles of gladness, or soothe with words of balm; and hers was a mind, too, that could be no unfit companion for more earnest hours.

But while I am digressing, Mr. Fleming, in his grave, stiff way, is leading Edith to the top of the room, in order to open the festivities by a quadrille. Miss Stanley of Donnington would have given the prettiest bracelet on her pretty arm to have been honored by the master of Griffin's Court with such a public announcement as to who was the favored place was destined for her; but, alas for human anguish. Miss Stanley had once hoped that Edith's bidden and human hopes! her hopes and her ambition were all tumbling about her like a card house touched by a breath. Edith went through the figures with easy grace, quite undisturbed by Miss Stanley's envious glances, while Mr. Fleming did the best that want of practice and a natural heaviness of movement would allow; happy, even with Edith for a partner, when the quadrille was over, and he was enabled to lead her to a seat. He was not long allowed the pleasure of a quiet chat with her, for the music striking up anew, she was claimed as a partner by Ralph Herbert, who, to Mr. Fleming's chagrin, was again at Grace Park. Dance after dance succeeded, in all of which Edith took a part, but she did not dance again with Mr. Fleming, and poor Miss Stanley did not dance with him at all.

When supper was announced, Mr. Fleming, anxious to show attention to Edith's mother, for Edith's sake, gave his arm to Mrs. Wynne, and led the way to the hall, followed by his guests. It was a wide, long room, still panelled with the oak wainscoting of ancient times. But while as it was, and large as it was, it was quite incapable of containing more than half the people assembled at Griffin's Court that night; so some of the latest arrivals were obliged to eat their supper as they could—standing in groups, or half-hidden in corners, none the less merry for missing their place at the supper-table.

As soon as supper was over, Mr. Fleming having led Mrs. Wynne back to her seat in the ball-room, managed by an adroit manoeuvre, to get to Edith's side, and whisper:

"Will you while away one of the long half-hours I have been obliged to endure to-night, Miss Wynne, by spending it with me?"

"Certainly," Edith said, rather surprised at the abruptness of the request. "I shall be only too happy to escape dancing, for I feel rather tired."

"If you go with all those people," he said, "you will not be allowed to escape dancing. But come this way; we can have a quiet promenade here."

He took her by surprise; and before she had time to reflect, opened a door at the end of the hall leading into a long gallery, which several swinging lamps showed was surrounded on all sides with paintings.

"I believe this is the only spot free from intruders," Fleming said, as they entered. "I am very fond of indulging myself here for an hour now and then. Do you care for paintings, Miss Wynne? Are you a judge of them?"

"Not a critical judge, certainly," Edith answered. "You might see a thousand faults in what I please me, perhaps; nevertheless, I am very fond of paintings."

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BY JOHN M. LOVELAND.

CHAPTER XIV.  
HUSBAND AND WIFE.

VILLERET had been absent from Paris for several months, when he received an urgent letter from Agnes, begging him to return. During his absence a little stranger had come to make glad the heart of the lonely young wife, and a tiny infant face was ready to welcome the father back to his home.

Agnes knew that he might come at any moment, and was doing her best, poor child, to make the room look bright and cheerful for him. She was bending over some flowers she was arranging when he came in, and he opened the door so softly that she did not hear him. For a moment he stood watching her, and then said, "Agnes." She flew to meet him, flushing with glad surprise.

"O George!"

He put his arms round her and kissed her; she drew him over to the fire and sat down.

"What have you been doing since I left?" he asked. "Have you any news to tell me?"

"News! Now, George, where should I get news, living here all alone, and seeing no one since you went? It is you who should have news."

She looked inquiringly at him. Would he tell her anything now of the business which caused that sudden journey?

"Well, I don't mind telling you, Agnes, I have found out something since I left you."

"What?" she said, eagerly.

He smiled. He had read that look of anxious curiosity in her face, and was sporting with it.

"Why, just this," he said; "that they sell very pretty jewelry in London, and I have brought you a specimen."



Fleming led her from one picture to another, telling the history of each—how he had bought them, under such and such circumstances, while he was in Italy during the past summer; who were the painters, and what the pictures themselves represented; mingling it all with sketches of Germany, where he seemed to have spent a considerable time, and short, graphic details of personal adventures or travels—until Edith found herself not only listening attentively, but really interested in what he said. What would old Mr. Fleming have done if he could have come back just then to Griffin's Court, and seen his son, with Edith leaning on his arm, pacing the long gallery, or pausing before some artist's work to speak of or admire it? How he would have condemned the mad extravagance which led his son to waste his substance on mere oil and canvas, or his time upon an idle girl! But our Mr. Fleming was a very different man from what his father had been. He was a man of education and cultivated taste—a man in whom much evil lay, but in whom, also, some good was scattered; and while Edith listened and replied to what he said, she forgot the dislike he inspired her with at times.

"You have spent a long time abroad, Mr. Fleming?" Edith observed, as he paused in something he had been saying.

"Yes, a long time. I was so fond of the continent once, I thought I never should have been contented to live in England; nevertheless, I have since found such charms in Griffin's Court that I would not leave it for the world."

He was looking at her with a look which might have told her that this powerful attraction which had weaned him from his love of the continent was not to be found in Griffin's Court alone; but Edith did not see it, and she replied:

"I do not wonder at your being attached to Griffin's Court, Mr. Fleming, for you have assuredly made it the most beautiful place in the country."

"It wants nothing but a mistress; do you not think so, Miss Wynne?"

"Then give it a mistress," Edith answered, laughing; but the next moment Fleming's look caused a blush to replace the laugh, and she regretted her hasty reply.

It had been quivering on his lips all night, the tide of that irrepressible love, and now it came bubbling, surging up in an impetuous flood of words, whose eloquence and earnestness confused Edith, as much as they surprised her.

"No, no, Mr. Fleming; I cannot listen to you—indeed I cannot. If you only knew—"

She stopped in utter confusion, as if she had been about to say something which she might afterwards regret.

"If I only knew what?" he asked; "but do not finish the sentence unless you wish to do so," he added, when he saw that the question embarrassed her.

"I will not ask to know anything, except what you choose to tell me. Fully retract that 'no,' or say you did not mean it, and I am content."

Edith was silent; Fleming took the silence for encouragement, and pressed his suit more warmly, if possible, than before.

"I cannot, indeed I cannot," she said at last, in answer to his earnest pleading. "I must say no again."

She drew her hand from his arm, and turned to leave the gallery, but Fleming stepped between her and the door, barring her passage; she stood for a moment, half-resolute, half-angry, and then attempted to pass in spite of the obstruction, fancying he would give way. What was the mad passion that led Fleming, instead of making way when he saw Edith resolved to pass, to attempt to prevent her egress by putting his arm round her waist?

"Let me go, Mr. Fleming," she exclaimed, while an angry flush rose to her face. "Do you fulfil your office of host by insulting your guests?"

"Listen to me, Miss Wynne! I do not mean to insult you. Will you listen to me?"

"I will not listen to you if you hold me thus. Let me go—there is some one coming to the door."

Edith was right; a hand was on the handle, and in a moment Miss Stanley was in the gallery.

"O," she said, with an air of pretty surprise; "I scarcely expected to find both the absentees together. Mrs. Wynne was looking for you, Miss Wynne," she said, glancing at Edith, "and I volunteered to find you for her."

Edith did not answer, but glided out while Miss Stanley continued, "We supposed that you, Mr. Fleming, were still with some of the deserters at the supper-table; whereas it appears you and Miss Wynne were—what shall I say?"

She laughed and stopped, as if to let Fleming fill up the sentence.

"Examining my picture gallery," he replied, with admirable coolness. "We were just going away as you came in."

"Indeed!" Miss Stanley said, with a little elevation of her pretty eyebrows, which might or might not express a doubt, and then she added, "I wonder what you and Miss Wynne will give me if I keep this picture-gazing a secret from some one?"

"From whom?" Fleming asked, wincing under the stinging of his tormentor.

"O, only from Mr. Herbert."

"Such an idea! who said so?"

"Miss Wynne did; at least, I so understood her; perhaps she was only jesting."

"Perhaps so, she does quiz sometimes. I like Edith Wynne, I really do like her very much," Miss Stanley repeated, as if anxious to impress her hearer with the great regard she held her in. "Yet, still I must admit that she is the least bit, just the very least bit in the world, of a flirt."

The warning came too late—that kindly, friendly, neighborly warning, telling of Edith's flirting and Edith's engagement—too late for any purpose, too late for Mr. Fleming's peace and safety—too late to deliver him up heart-whole to the siege of the pretty diplomatist. Fleming, in the bitterness of his disappointment, forgot his politeness, and answering Miss Stanley only by an angry, impatient gesture, hurriedly left the picture gallery. Crossing the hall he met some of the departing guests, and glancing at them, recognized Mr. and Mrs. Wynne, followed by Edith leaning on Ralph Herbert's arm. Edith, as she passed, gave him a slight distant bow, and hastened on. The next moment the roll of carriage wheels told him she was speeding homewards beside her affianced husband.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A PURPOSE FRUSTRATED.

A DARK post-chaise, with a pair of lean horses, stood before the door of Mr. Fleming's house a few days after the great ball, which was still furnishing food for talk to half the county. The chaise contained only one gentleman, who got out, and giving the bell a lusty ring, stood upon the steps sniffing the frosty air, and rubbing his hands, while he waited for the door to be opened.

"A visitor to the master," the servant thought, who drew back the wide door in answer to the summons. "He came by train, too—in a post-chaise from the railway. Most likely he is from London."

All these deductions were made in a moment, while the stranger inquired, was Mr. Fleming at home?

"Yes sir. Who shall I say?"

In reply the visitor placed his card in the servant's hand, who, after showing him into the library, went to convey the card to his master.

He found Mr. Fleming in the breakfast-room, still in his dressing-gown and slippers, busy with the morning-paper—or, at least, apparently busy with it, for although his head leaned forward on one hand, and his eye was seemingly fixed on the sheet he held in the other, his mind was dwelling upon Edith Wynne and Miss Stanley's intelligence. So intently was he occupied that he started when the servant interrupted his meditations by saying:

"The gentleman who gave this is waiting to see you in the library, sir."

Fleming looked at the card, turned it over and over, but could make nothing of it. "Mr. Robert Ward, 27, Red Lion Square." He had never heard of the gentleman in his life.

"I don't remember the name. What is he like?" he asked, abruptly.

"Low-sized, stout, and bald, sir. He came in a chaise from the Inn."

Fleming was none the wiser yet. He must go and see him.

When he entered the library, he found Mr. Robert Ward, of Red Lion Square, quite at home, enjoying the warmth of the comfortable library fire, before which he stood, with his hands behind his back, displaying a good breadth of chest, crossed by a thick gold watch-chain, pendant from which hung heavy seals.

"You hold me at a disadvantage, Mr. Ward," Fleming said, in the cold way habitual to him when he was out of humor, as he was then. "I cannot remember having ever seen you before."

"I dare say you don't," Mr. Ward said, quite coolly, not the least discomposed by Fleming's manner. "I never saw you either. I have only come on a mere matter of business."

"O, will you not take a chair?" Fleming said, a little more courteously, as the absurdity of venting his ill-humor on a stranger presented itself. Besides, the word "business," to Mr. Fleming, meant money-paying or money-lending, which latter part of his father's practice he still adhered to; for Mr. Fleming, although liberal in expenditures on himself or any person or thing likely to gratify himself, was tinged strongly with his father's propensity for gain.

Mr. Ward took possession of the offered chair as easily as he had possessed himself of the entire front of the fire, observing, as he dropped into it:

"You have a comfortable place here, Mr. Fleming. Your father was a lucky man to be able to exchange the cares of business for such a snug box as this."

"You knew my father, then?"

"Yes, I knew your father."

"Did you come from London to-day?" Fleming asked, without commenting further on the fact of Mr. Ward having known his father.

"Yes, and I came straight here, only stopping for a little at Grace Park."

Then he was Mr. Wynne's solicitor, doubtless come to make some arrangement about that heavy loan; and the time had, perhaps, arrived, when he could make a move in the game of oppression first dreamed of that summer day on which Mr. Wynne had walked over to Griffin's Court to ask him to dinner. But Fleming did not speak; he only sat watching his visitor—his dark eyes gleaming from under the tent of his overhanging brow—and Mr. Ward went on:

"The chief thing I want with you to-day, Mr. Fleming, is a precise statement of how you and Mr. Wynne stand, in order that everything between you be adjusted."

Fleming hesitated. He could not get at the bottom of that speech exactly. "Adjusted!" what did it mean?—not paid off; he could not mean that; Mr. Wynne had no means for such a thing, unless he borrowed from another. But who would lend? Old Fleming had given as near the value of the whole property, perhaps, as any other would give; nearer, certainly, than he would have given if he had not had a strong desire to secure Grace Park, as it was a part of the original estate of Griffin's Court. Fleming looked rapidly at all the possibilities, some of which would serve his purpose, while one, at least, would ruin it, and then he looked at his guest.

Mr. Ward was certainly not like a man who had come to manage a bad cause, to win time for a client, to wheedle, coax, or temporize. There he sat, brisk, bright, and quite at his ease, scanning with his quick eye every line of Fleming's lowering face.

"Our adjustment of the matter will of course depend on how you propose to adjust it," Fleming said at length. "My father lent a large sum of money to Mr. Wynne, on which sum Mr. Wynne has not troubled himself to pay me any interest for some time past. At the time the loan was effected, he wanted Mr. Wynne, in place of borrowing, to sell, which he had full power to do; but he declined, although my father would have been glad to purchase, as Grace Park was at one time a part of his estate."

"Yes, yes, I understand," the astute lawyer said; "and when Mr. Wynne would not sell, the money was lent, as coming to much the same thing in the end. Your father was a practical man, and doubtless knew that a mortgage is often as sure as a purchase, and much cheaper. Nothing but foreclosure, and buy in—that is easily done, might have been done before, might be done yet, only that I am empowered by my client to make a different arrangement."

Fleming winced, and moved restlessly on his chair. The reins of his power over Edith seemed shaking loose in his hands.

"Time is pressing," Mr. Ward observed, looking at his watch. "I must catch the evening return train to London. Could I see your books, or will you let me have a statement, as near as possible, of your demand, interest and all?"

Mr. Ward stated truly time was pressing; and Mr. Fleming wanted to gain time. He wanted leisure to think. He wanted an opportunity to consult with Walker, so he said.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Ward, if I decline to put you in possession of the private affairs either of myself or of Mr. Wynne, without his permission. I shall see Mr. Wynne to-morrow, and after that I will communicate with you."

"I anticipated this, Mr. Fleming, although Mr. Wynne said you would have no objection, and would be only too glad to get your money. Now, it appears you are not glad to get it; and I am proved right in having provided myself with this, which is Mr. Wynne's written authority."

Fleming took the paper held out to him, which contained only a few words:

"DEAR FLEMING,—I shall be obliged by your giving any information in your power to Mr. Ward respecting the mortgage you hold on Grace Park, and the arrears of interest."

"Yours truly, H. WYNNE."

"Two lines will do it," Fleming said, unlocking his desk. "I have it all here somewhere," said he, going to a desk, and turning over its contents. He could not, however, find what he wanted. Mr. Ward took a note-book from his breast-pocket.

"I have a memorandum with me; if you just glance at it, to see if it is correct, that may do for the present. Mr. Herbert gave it to me this morning."

Fleming withdrew his hand from the desk, but did not touch the strip of paper Mr. Ward had laid on the table. His brow gathered blackness at the very mention of Ralph's name.

"Mr. Herbert!" he repeated. "What has he to do with it?"

"Why, Mr. Fleming, the real fact is, Mr. Herbert is my client, and it is he who is going to take your place as mortgagee of Grace Park."

Fleming passed his hand over his forehead at these tidings, and then laid it heavily on the table, while Mr. Ward proceeded:

"Mr. Herbert's property is not very large, but he had a long minority, and a prudent guardian in his mother; so that he is in possession of a sum sufficient to meet this call upon it. Grace Park is a good investment for Mr. Wynne's life, and at his death the creditor becomes the owner through his wife; so the thing is simple enough."

Fleming rose from his chair.

"He will be a luckier man than I have been, if he gets his father-in-law to pay the interest—that's all I can say. But you must excuse me, Mr. Ward. I have already lost too much time talking of this matter; therefore I must refer you to my solicitor for all the particulars."

He wrote the address on the back of a card of his own, adding, as he handed it to Mr. Ward:

"I will write to Mr. Graves myself by post to-day, and you can call upon him to-morrow."

The interview was at an end; and the visitor found himself bowed out, half-courteously, half-surlily, from Mr. Fleming's presence.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A DINNER AT GRIFFIN'S COURT.

THE night was cold, and the chill wind pierced keenly through the demesne at Grace Park, as Ralph and Edith issued from the house, and took their way along a side-path, which led to the wood dividing the two domains of Grace Park and Griffin's Court.

Edith and Ralph walked on briskly, at a pace which soon brought them to the gates, where they were to separate; for Ralph was to dine at Griffin's Court that evening, and Edith had proposed to go through the park with him. When the gates were reached, he did not pass through, but stood leaning against them by Edith's side.

"This dinner-party, I confess, puzzles me," she said. "It seems so odd that Mr. Fleming did not ask papa, and stranger still that he should ask you, after all that has happened."

"After my robbing him of you, is it?" Ralph said, laughingly. "Well, it only shows how forgiving of injuries he is. For my part, I do not think I should like to ask my rival to dinner. Had I ever a rival?"

"Yes, you had plenty," Edith answered, with a saucy laugh. "Last summer you had two—first, Mr. Stanley; and next, your brother Arthur."

"You must have a very diversified taste, then; for we certainly are all unlike."

"Ah, yes; but Mr. Stanley is handsome and showy, while Arthur's uniform alone would be enough to make an impression on any girl's heart. Don't you remember saying to me once, 'Women, like moths, are ever caught by glare?'"

"Come, come, Edie, you must not allude to that. I was angry with you, then; I remember, about a certain captain in the Dragons; and we made up that quarrel long ago. But about Mr. Fleming and his dinner," he said, abruptly, returning to the subject from which they had diverged. "He and I had a very solemn chat about you the other day, when he gave me the invitation."

"About me! What did he find to say about me?" Edith asked, her feminine curiosity roused in an instant.

"Why, we met in Abbotsville, and walked to Grace Park gates together, talking quite amicably. He alluded himself to his admiration for you, and told me that, had he known the relation in which you and I stood to each other, he never would have avowed that admiration as he had been tempted to do at Griffin's Court. Of course I said everything that was necessary on the occasion. You know," he added, with a smile, "I could afford to be generous, as I was on the winning side. When we got to Grace Park, I asked him to come on to the house; but he declined, and we parted, I having first promised to dine with him to-night."

Edith mused. "I do not understand it, Ralph, and I do not like it either. This dinner-party will renew an acquaintance which I had much rather let drop. After what has passed between Mr. Fleming and me, I should have a certain awkwardness in meeting him again."

"If he feels your refusal as little as he appears to do, why should you be troubled about it?" he asked. "He was very kind and friendly to me, and I could not fling his civility in his face."

"Well, well, it can't be helped now," she said: "yet I have still a lingering wish that you were not going there to-night. Will you be home early?"

Ralph laughed, and promising that he would, shook hands, and opening the gate passed through it into the wood. Edith stood watching his retreating figure until its indistinct outline vanished in the distance, and then she returned to the house alone, with slower steps than those with which she left it.

The dining-room at Griffin's Court was the same room in which supper was laid on the night of the great Christmas ball. The solid dark mahogany furniture which it contained had been in use during the reign of the Griffins of Griffin's Court, for the house had been purchased as it stood by old Mr. Fleming, and when his son came into possession of it, that room and the library alone escaped interference from the upholsterer, into whose hands he had entrusted the re-furnishing of the house in its present style.

In the days of old Fleming's residence at Griffin's Court, he almost entirely confined himself to the use of two or three rooms, and the furniture of the rest was hustled away anywhere into corners, where it was left to silence, and the quiet possession of the spiders and the dust. Under the direction of the younger Fleming, however, everything was restored to order, and the faded furniture of the other rooms gave place to newer importations from London, while that of the dining-room was reinstated in its old position. At the well-appointed dinner-table, on the night I speak of, were seated Mr. Fleming, Ralph Herbert, and young Stanley of Donnington, and each and all of the party seemed well disposed for enjoyment.

The host himself appeared to be in excellent health and spirits. To all seeming, the blow of Edith's engagement, although it might have fallen heavily at first, had lost its weight, and sat lightly on him then. It would have been difficult for even the closest observer to have detected a shade of welcome less cordial from Fleming to Ralph on his arrival, than that accorded to his other guest.

"We were going to vote you present when you came," Fleming said to Ralph, as the dinner proceeded. "Stanley was so hungry after his long ride, that he was getting savage."

"Yes, ten miles in the frost on such a night as this, is enough to give a man an appetite," Ralph an-

swered. "Even my walk through the wood has put a keen edge on mine."

"An appetite is a blessing when a man has a dinner to eat," Stanley said; "otherwise it's inconvenient, I should think."

"I can endorse that," Fleming observed; "for I remember once, in crossing a mountain in Spain, a stupid mule that we had went right down a ravine, with all our provisions on her back, and left us nothing for it but to make our way to the posada again, which we never reached until night, and you may rely on it we were pretty hungry when we did get there at last."

"I am sure it did not increase your powers of appreciating the mountain scenery," Ralph said, with a smile.

"You have been a long time abroad, Mr. Fleming," remarked Stanley. "Are you very fond of continental society?"

"Well," Fleming replied, "I am very fond of the continent itself; but as for the society, I know very little of it, for I make but few acquaintances. Last summer I had a very agreeable tour, though, with a friend, through Italy. I was wandering about in search of pictures for my gallery here, and a terrible robbing set of these picture-dealers are."

"Terrible; almost as bad as the turf fellows that you were warning me about, when you heard I had a horse in training for the spring races. Who knows but I may win the cup; and if I do, I'll give a tremendous dinner at Donnington in honor of the event."

"You are not in earnest, Stanley?" Ralph asked.

"Have you really a horse in training? What's the name of it?"

"I have really. A downright beauty, too, who will win all before her. I have a first-rate jockey engaged, and a capital rig chosen already, white slashed with scarlet, so that he will be seen a mile across the field. I have christened my racer Miss Wynne," he added, with a laugh, "purely out of compliment to you, Herbert."

"Nonsense," Ralph said, impatiently, annoyed at Stanley's heedless linking of Edith's name with the subject of their dinner chat, and that in the presence of the servants, too.

"Are you a horse-fancier?" Fleming asked Ralph, making a well-timed diversion, so as to prevent Stanley's rejoinder until the servants, who had just removed the cloth and were already replenishing the fire and placing more wine on the table, should withdraw.

"It's an expensive amusement which I cannot afford to indulge in," Ralph answered. "I always keep a capital horse for my own use, and that is the only extravagance of the kind I am guilty of."

"You are in the right," Fleming said; and then, addressing Stanley, he added, "Come, pass the decanter. Have a glass, Herbert?" he said, as Stanley pushed the port towards Ralph.

Herbert filled, and drank his glass half-way down.

"Come, finish it, and take another," his host said, helping himself, and sending the decanter back to Ralph. "That's good old wine, trust me. It has been lying in the dark for many a day, ripening for our enjoyment."

"This is the old wine, I suppose, that was in the cellars at Griffin's Court when your father bought it?" Stanley said. "It's capital stuff. I wish I had a store like it at Donnington."

"I wish you had," Fleming replied, "for I would go over and help you to drink it. I won't have empty glasses here," he added, observing that Ralph had not filled his; at the same time raising the decanter, and pouring out a bumper for him. "Remember, you have a cold walk home before you, and a few glasses of this will drive the frost a hundred miles away."

"I hope not," Ralph said, smiling, but not touching his wine, which stood before him; "for we are to have a sleigh drive to-morrow at Grace Park. Mr. Wynne and I have got the wheels taken off the pony-carriage, so as to make a sledge of it; and we are going to try the experiment in the morning."

"If I were you, Herbert, I'd get bells to the ponies' heads?" said Stanley. "We did that sort of thing last year at Donnington, and Grace drove. But skating is the fashion this season, so I'm teaching her to skate."

This led to a long discussion on winter sports. Hunting at home, sleigh-driving in America, life in the prairie, and a hundred other topics, were touched on, discussed, and flung aside; and then, at the end of an hour or so, they returned to where they had started, and opened the question of the sledge and skates once more.

"I say, Herbert," young Stanley suggested, "you could not do better than drive your sledge over to-morrow to Donnington, and try a turn with us on the ice. Will you come, too, Mr. Fleming?"

"Not to-morrow," Fleming said, with a momentary reserve of manner, which Ralph knew proceeded from a dislike to meet Edith just yet. But the next moment he had seized the decanter, and was replenishing his glass, saying as he did so:

"Come, Stanley, follow my example. Herbert's wine stands untested, and I must tempt him with a toast. You will not refuse to drink this," he said, raising his wine to his lips. "Miss Wynne's health, and a happy future to her!"

Ralph drank, and laid down his glass, thanking Fleming in Edith's stead for his good wishes.

The wine he had been drinking all night was beginning to get to Stanley's head, and he said, recklessly:

"Faith! people said you had an idea of her your-

self, Fleming; but as you take it so easily, I suppose it is not so."

Fleming reddened.

"No, it is the truth," he replied, after a moment. "I did not know how matters stood with Mr. Herbert then; you fully understand this, Herbert, I am sure?" he said, turning to Ralph.

"Yes, fully," Ralph answered; "but I don't see why we should discuss it at all to-night. Suppose you come home, Stanley; you have taken as much wine as is good for you, and it is getting late."

But Fleming would not hear of it. "It was early yet," he said; and he insisted on their remaining.

When he had got Ralph, who had risen, to resume his seat, he began to talk fast and furiously, as though, like Mr. Stanley, he, too, had been lavish with the wine. He told them stories of adventures abroad, sketching anecdotes of scenes in the Swiss mountains, or his life in Vienna and Paris, in both of which cities he appeared to have passed a considerable time, until the night wore late, and Ralph once more rose to leave. Stanley followed his example, and then Fleming rose, too, with the flush of the wine upon his face.

"I say, Stanley," he said, "you have a long ride; ten miles is no joke such a night as this. Suppose you stay where you are till morning?"

"Do you think I'm afraid of the cold, Fleming? They'd have me in the hue and cry at Donnington, if I stayed out all night."

"Come, don't be obstinate, now. I tell you it's absurd of you to persist in taking such a useless journey. They'd guess, at home, that I kept you. I am sure it's snowing, too; for it's dreadfully cold, and it is threatening all night."

Stanley had rung the bell for his horse, and the servant came to answer it.

"Is it a bad night, Wilson?" Fleming asked the man.

"Yes sir, very cold, and it snows hard too."

"Mr. Stanley rang for his horse to be brought round, but he does not want it now; he stays here to-night," Fleming said.

Stanley had not drank anything since Ralph's first proposition to go home, and the fumes of the wine were beginning to disperse, but it had so far an effect on him yet, as to make him, to use Fleming's word, obstinate in his resolve to go home; so he said:

"I positively must return to Donnington to-night. Will you excuse my refusal of your hospitality, but I could not think of alarming my mother?"

"Very well," said Fleming, withdrawing an opposition that he saw was vain. "Wilson, bring round Mr. Stanley's horse."

In five minutes Wilson returned, saying that the horse which had been ready saddled in the stable for the past hour was at the door, and the occupants of the dining-room proceeded to the hall.

"We are like Macbeth's witches," Stanley said, putting on his outside coat and seizing his riding whip; "for there's just three of us, and I wonder when shall we three meet again?"

It was a heedless word, heedlessly spoken; Stanley did not think of it at the time, but he remembered afterwards that Ralph made some jesting reply, while Fleming looked from one to the other, and said nothing.

"Good-night, and take care you don't get lost in the snow," Fleming said the next instant, with a smile to Stanley; "it would make a colder bed than that you refused at Griffin's Court."

"O, I'll live to empty another bottle of your grand old port," Stanley replied, as he shook Fleming's hand at parting.

"I think," Ralph said with a smile to Fleming, "that that wine of yours has taken both his head and his heart."

"Come, none of your insinuations as to my head, my boy," Stanley answered, good-naturedly. "It's as steady as your own this minute; so, come along. Good-night, Fleming; good-night."

Ralph's hand and his host's met in a cordial farewell shake, and the two young men went on, leaving Mr. Fleming standing alone in the hall. In a very few moments after a hand was upon a window on the second floor of Griffin's Court. The heavy sash was slowly and noiselessly raised. It was a lobby window above the hall door, and looked down directly on the broad steps of the house, where Ralph and Stanley still stood, and upon the wide sweep before it, where the groom was holding Stanley's horse. The face that owned the hand which raised the window peered stealthily out, and that face was Fleming's. Intently, but unseen by those below, he watched them, as, after a moment's debate about something in an undertone, they descended the steps together.

It was snowing heavily, and as Stanley approached his horse, he took the reins from the groom, and throwing them over his arm, proposed to Ralph that, as he was on foot, he would walk his horse to Grace Park, and they could be so far together. To this proposition, however, Ralph objected, on account of the cold of the night, and the drifting snow, which made the short path through the wood preferable to the longer walk by the high road; so they said good-night, and Ralph, turning with a rapid step, entered the wood through the arched walk, passing on homewards under the starless sky and the heavy snow flakes.

As Stanley rode away rapidly down the avenue, and Ralph's figure disappeared in the shadow of the night and the gloom of the trees, Fleming withdrew slowly from the window, letting the frame down again into its place with the same stealthy noiselessness he had observed in raising it.

Not very long after, a servant belonging to Griffin's Court came up the long avenue to the house, from the direction of the front gates. As he got half-way up the drive, the long ringing noise of a gun-shot sounded from the wood. He stopped to listen, but the shot was not repeated, and he pursued his way again. As he neared Griffin's Court, the figure of a man was dimly discernible close to, and apparently just issuing from the wood. The servant looked suspiciously at him for a moment, but a closer scrutiny satisfied him that it was Walker.

"It is a snowy night, sir," the man observed, touching his cap; and then he asked, "Did you hear a shot in the wood, sir?"

"No," Walker answered, promptly. "But what are you doing out at this time of night?"

"Just walking about the place," the man said, evasively.

Walker did not, of course, believe him; and muttering something about a curious night to choose for a walk, passed on to a side door of half-glass, which opened into the library, and let himself in by a latch-key, while the servant pursued his way to the out-offices, where he slept.

The snow drifted heavily nearly all the night through, and its pure flakes lay white over valley and mountain.

While the snow fell without, a servant sat in the great chair in the hall at Mr. Wynne's, before a huge coal fire, waiting for Ralph Herbert. But the night waned, the fire burned and blazed, and then finally died out entirely. The man, weary with watching, fell into a sound sleep, which lasted until the gray dawn stole in through the hall windows; yet still Ralph Herbert had not come back to Grace Park.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DEAD IN THE SNOW.

THE snow had been falling on through the night, not continuously, but in heavy, drifting flakes, which covered the high road, and lay like a white sheet over the fields and the lawn at Griffin's Court. It clustered, too, on the leafless branches of the trees in the wood, spreading down on their thin stemlike rods that drooped towards the ground, the white and frozen incrustations in many places supplying the want of foliage by a fanciful approach to snowy buds, or leaves or flowers. Snow lay everywhere over the woods, and hills, and plains; and the heavy, leaden sky looked down gloomily on the continuous sheet of white which met the first beams of sunrise.

It was early, very early—at least, for a season when even the sun himself is a loiterer—when two men wearing the dress of workmen, and evidently on their way to begin their daily toil, entered the wood of Griffin's Court. They came from the direction of Abbotsville, and plodded on through the thick snow-crust, the track of their strong shoes marking every step they took. The morning was cold, for the raw, biting air was piercing and bitter, and the lead-colored sky above betokened more frost and more snow yet to come.

On they went—still on, however, with quick steps, in order to keep their blood warm, as well as to reach their place of employment as quickly as possible. They had arrived at a part of the wood where the broad path they were traversing was crossed by a narrow one, which led direct by the left hand to Griffin's Court demesne, and by the right to Grace Park. Over this path, exactly in the way they were pursuing, something lay in the snow. It was almost as thick as the trunk of a tree. What was it? A ponderous old branch, perhaps, which the weight of the snow had brought down by its pressure. The men stepped before it, and one of them touched it with his foot. Probably the touch had more force in it than the man intended, for it so disturbed the heavy mass that it turned round completely, and by the involuntary action shook off its snowy covering, revealing at the same moment to the horror-stricken men, not the dark, rugged bark of a tree, but the upturned face of a man, whose pallid, rigid features were set in death.

They brushed the snow off the mossy sward, and drew the body over from the path to the soft grass. One of them inserted his hand beneath the shirt, to feel if he could detect the faintest heart-throb; but all was still, and the deathlike coldness of the body forbade a hope.

They bent down to examine the figure more closely, and a nearer view revealed a long streak of dark blood passing like a crimson cord across his snowy shirt-front.

"There has been foul play here, Jem," one of the men observed to his companion, at the same time loosening the waistcoat, that he might follow with his hand the track of the frozen stream to its source.

Right at the back of the head, as though the shot had been fired from behind, he found a round hole, which he recognized at once as made by a bullet. Through that narrow orifice the life-blood had ebbed away, and the clustering locks of fair hair were clotted in the red tide. The man drew away his hand, and stood back looking at his companion, and then down on the ghastly object that lay at his feet.

"He's dead, and no mistake about it," he said at length; "and an ugly-looking business it is, too, I'm thinking."

"What's to be done, comrade?" the other man asked, doggedly.

"I wish we had not come here at all," the first speaker answered. "I don't like meddling with corpses."

"Come away, then," his companion said, in a half

whisper. "I'm getting frightened like. How cold it is!" he added, with a shudder.

They drew the dead man's cloak across his head and chest, and then walked away slowly by the same path they had come by. At the edge of the wood they stopped for a consultation as to what was to be done.

"Here, take a drop of this," the bolder of them said, producing a flask from his pocket. "It will give you Dutch courage, any way."

The man declined the offer.

"No," he said, "thank ye. None of your Dutch courage for me. But it makes one sick to see such things. We'll have to go a-swearin' about it, I'm thinking, Jem," he added, presently.

"I'm thinking we will; but what about that? It's not much we'll have to tell," the other answered, trudgling down the road, followed by his less self-possessed companion.

People were beginning to stir already, for above the tops of the trees blue smoke was curling upwards, in the direction of Grace Park and Griffin's Court, and when they neared the village, the sound of life was distinctly audible in the voices that reached each side as they passed the cottages which lined each side of the street; but, as yet, the street itself was empty, and the two men went on through it in silence, with that unspoken tale of horror upon their lips.

About an hour after a party, consisting of three policemen and one of the workmen who had found the body, entered the wood, and went rapidly along the foot-track to the opening before described, where the roads met, and there, drawn away a little on the grass, was lying, stiff and mute, he of whose death such a startling tale had reached them. The guide pointed out the dark mass as they approached, and the men stopped beside it, while their leader stooped to remove the fold of the cloak which shrouded the face.

No wayfarer lost in the snow, no stranger benighted and perishing of cold, which the men's fancy had magnified into a murder, met their eager eyes as they started back, and then bent downwards again, over the dead man.

"Who is he?" their guide asked, as, looking from face to face, he saw they recognized him.

"Mr. Herbert, from the Park," the leader of the party answered. "This is an ill night's work for some one."

He stooped down, drawing the head upon his knee, and searching with his hand for the wound the man had described, the crimson stream from which was now plainly visible in the clear light.

"Perhaps a poacher shot him by accident," one of the men hazarded.

The sergeant made no reply; but pushing aside the blood-stained clusters of Ralph's beautiful hair, he exposed to view the gun-shot wound, and by its side another of a different kind, which was seemingly inflicted by a strong blow, dealt with a heavy weapon, for the skull was bruised and bent under the spot.

"This was not given by chance," he observed, drawing the attention of the bystanders to the hideous mark.

The fact was plain enough, it needed no comment or enlargement; and he laid Ralph's head back gently upon the grass.

"Is he dead?" one of the men asked. "Is he surely dead?"

"Dead, sure enough," the sergeant answered, slowly, looking down thoughtfully on the body as it lay before him.

It was all too true! The gay young spirit which once stirred in that inanimate clay was gone forever! Nothing remained now of Edith Wynne's gallant, handsome lover save the perishable clay on the cold, snowy sward.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A CLUE.

THERE were drawn blinds in the village inn, where Ralph Herbert's body had been conveyed by the police to await the inquest. Drawn blinds and half-closed shutters in compliment to the Wynnes of Grace Park; for Ralph himself was a comparative stranger at Abbotsville, his home being in another county.

In the little inn parlor, dignified with the name of "coffee-room," the townsfolk assembled to talk of the crime; for by this time Dr. Walters, who was the principal physician of Abbotsville, had examined Ralph's body, and his opinion coincided with that of the police; consequently, the belief of foul play had obtained general credence, and the excitement was intense.

If there were closed blinds in the inn at Abbotsville, there were closed blinds, too, at Grace Park, where Edith lay, stricken to the earth by her grief and her despair.

It had been her mother's task to break the intelligence to her, which had come already with a crushing weight upon herself and Mr. Wynne; and to that soothing care we will leave her now, and come away from the closed windows and closed gates of Grace Park into the more stirring events that are going on outside its precincts.

From lip to lip, with the rapidity of lightning, the intelligence of Ralph's death had flown all round the neighborhood. Men stood agast, and talked or listened, and then asked each other, in muttered whispers, Who could it be? The murderer was among them somewhere, but where? The police were busy trying to answer that question, but so far without success. Next day, the inquest was opened,

and adjourned at the request of Arthur Herbert, whom a telegram from Mr. Wynne had brought from Portsmouth, where his vessel lay; and Arthur's demand for delay was seconded by the police, who required time to seek for evidence.

Here and there, over the village, and upon gates, or walls, along the highway, for miles round, was posted a government proclamation, offering a reward of one hundred pounds for the detection of the criminal; and side by side with it was another from Arthur Herbert, to the effect that:

Whereas my brother, Ralph Herbert, met his death in Griffin's Court wood, on the night of January the 14th, 188—, at the hand of an assassin: I hereby offer a reward of £500 to any person or persons who shall give such information as will convict his murderer. And I undertake to hand over this sum of £500 to such person or persons immediately after his conviction.

(Signed) ARTHUR HERBERT.

People stood about these placards, reading them, wondering what they would bring to light, now that the weight of money was thrown into the scale against the assassin. Then they lounged away from them, to gather round the beer-shop doors, talking of them, whispering, conjecturing, nodding their heads, and looking wise, but knowing nothing.

It was the evening before the day to which the inquest had been adjourned. Arthur Herbert was going slowly down the road that led to Griffin's Court, in the direction of the wood, which the police were in possession of, and guarded jealously day and night. By Arthur's side, a quiet, respectable-looking man was walking; and speaking earnestly to this man, Arthur was giving an account of the minutest circumstances of that last day and night of Ralph's life, as far as he had learned it from Mr. Wynne and young Stanley of Donnington, who was the last person that had seen Ralph alive. When he had done his recital, word for word, his companion went back over it all, sitting, questioning, suggesting, his gray eye now fixed on Herbert, and now wandering over the fields and wood thoughtfully. Then they stopped awhile on the road, talking still, and passers-by began to turn and look at them. For Arthur was a point of interest just then at Abbotsville, and his companion was a stranger; so they went into the wood, and sat down out of view of the road, on the trunk of a fallen tree.

Far away, silent and still, rose the gray walls of Griffin's Court; shining among the trees, in the evening light, the blue smoke of its chimneys rising in straight spires to the sky. Their faces were towards the house, and their backs to the high road, which they had just left.

"That's the house where he dined, sir, is it not?" the man asked, pointing through the trees towards Griffin's Court. Arthur nodded assent.

"Could anybody there owe him a grudge, do you think, sir?" and he looked keenly upwards into his companion's face.

A thought came into Arthur's mind, and he bent down to his companion, speaking low. The man took out his pocket-book, and made notes. After awhile they got up and went slowly on, still skirting the wood.

"Hush! who is that?"

The man's quick ear caught the sound of footsteps on the dry leaves, as through the trees the figure of a man came towards them. He wore a cap of fox's fur, and a waistcoat of the same, from which was suspended a powder-flask; but he had no gun. He was coming on slowly, and watching the figures of Arthur and the stranger as they approached, with eyes as keen as those fixed upon himself.

"A wood-ranger," Arthur suggested.

The other shook his head.

"More like a poacher; his eyes have a quick look of fear and watchfulness. Go on, if you please, sir, and leave me; I'll see you to-night again."

Arthur went on, as he was desired. The man touched his cap as he moved away, and neared the new-corn, thinking, as he went, "He's not an unlikely person to have been in the wood at night." To this poacher, then—for poacher he was—our new friend went up boldly, asking his way to Abbotsville, as if he did not know it.

"Why, you are turning your back on it," the man said. "You are a stranger here, I suppose?" he added, suspiciously, "as you don't seem to know much about the place."

"Not much," the other said, carelessly, turning round on his path, and joining him. "I am out of Somersetshire; I got into a little trouble there, and I came away for awhile."

"Ay, ay; we be all in trouble sometimes," the other said, sympathizingly, thinking of his last six weeks in Errington jail for forgetting the regulations of the game laws.

"Yes, the world's full of it," the stranger rejoined, shaking his head; "and we are forever doing something ourselves to pull it down on us."

"I suppose, then, you brought this on yourself?" his companion observed, eyeing him with a look that betokened a lazy desire to know all about it.

"Ay, and in a simple way, too," the other answered; and then he added, with a sly wink, "I was too fond of shooting."

"Phew!" the poacher said, contemptuously. "It's only the game laws you broke."

"I think I'll rest awhile," the stranger observed, saying, as he did so, "This would not be a bad place for a shot; there's game here, I'm thinking."

The other laughed. "If you tried shooting to-night, ye might chance to shoot the police; there's a lot of them in there."

"Police!" he repeated, looking quite astonished at the information. "What are they doing?"

Of course the poacher did as any one might expect he would, and gave him a full account of a matter that he knew as well as himself.

"It's an ugly business!" the stranger said, when he had done, and then he went on drawing his companion to talk of it further, sifting him by sly questions, that he never saw the drift of, until he got confidential and particular, talking of a certain night that he had been out "at his trade," as he called it, and what he saw, and what he heard, the stranger listening to it all, still going on winding and twining round his unsuspecting companion, until he was as deep in the affair as himself.

"Why did you not tell all this before?" he asked, at length.

"Why, just because I had no business to be in the wood at all, and I did not want to go to gaol with the help of my eyes and my tongue."

"You're a fool, man; why, you'd get a pardon if you brought this to anything, and a reward besides."

"I don't want to earn blood-money; they say it's not lucky," the other answered, doggedly. "I'm thinking now I had better have held my tongue; so I'll just bid you good evening."

"Not so fast, my friend," the man said, laying his hand on his arm. "I am a detective officer and I'll want you at the inquest to-morrow."

The intelligence came on his companion like a thunder-bolt.

"I thought you were some one from Somersetshire," he said.

The man laughed, and raising his fingers to his lips, whistled twice. In a moment there came a sound of some one crushing through the branches of the trees, and a policeman appeared.

"Take this man with you to Abbotsville, and keep your eye on him till to-morrow," he said. "We shall want him at the inquest; and," he added, with a wink, "he might forget to come."

"There's no help for it," John Leonard thought, as he went away; "and, sure, if I earn this money, I did not go to look for it; and so he reconciled himself to it."

Our friend the detective had come down from Scotland Yard at Arthur Herbert's special request, and some purpose, too, it would seem. After Leonard had gone, he passed through into the heart of the wood, to the spot where Ralph's body had been found, and where the police were searching in vain for foot-steps of the murdered and the murderer, which the snow, treacherous to the law and kindly to the law-breaker, had hidden under its white bosom.

The sergeant of police was alone when the Scotland Yard man joined him. He was raking in the broken-up snow, and amongst the dried leaves and moss.

"I have a clue in my hand now, Jones," the other said, coming up to him. "It's a track, any way, that will make all Abbotsville stare to-morrow."

The sergeant stopped working with his rake, and leant upon it to listen.

"I have been turning something like that through my head these two days," he said, when the other had done speaking; "but it seemed such a jump to take—only it wasn't just him, it was another."

He went on raking and thinking, while the other man stood watching. Presently he drew over a heap of weeds and leaves. As they came towards him on the rake, something fell from amongst them, and lay on the ground, while the weeds still adhered to the rake. Jones flung them off hastily, and throwing out the rake again, caught what had fallen, and drew it in. He lifted it up and looked at it.

"Here's something may be of use," he said, holding it towards his companion, who took it and examined it carefully.

"Yes, but not for to-morrow; you must find the owner first, and there's no time now."

The sergeant took it back from the detective, and throwing down his rake, they walked away together, examining their prize eagerly. They held a fresh clue to the mystery now, in the shape of a dark kid glove; the next step must be to find the hand that wore it.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE LONELY WIFE.

It was a dark night at the close of February. How cold it had been all that month! and Agnes had shrunk away from it, as only delicate frames like hers do shrink from the biting air of winter. Her husband was absent, too; he had been away a considerable time; and, worse than all, for the past few weeks he had not written to her. Could there be anything wrong?—not once, nor twice, but a hundred times she had asked herself this question; but the real truth never occurred to her. What a blessing it is that we cannot see things sometimes as they are! Villeret, in the absorbing interest of other affairs, had forgotten her; and, on the night I speak of, he was hurrying to repair the error of his long silence—hurrying for fear that uneasiness and anxiety on his account might induce her to take a step which, most of all, he dreaded—namely, to follow him to England.

It was rather late, and Fanchette and her mistress were together in Agnes's room.

"No letter to-night either," she said, wearily, looking up to the girl. "He must be ill."

"Ah, no, madame; monsieur intends coming," her maid answered, hopefully. "He will come, instead of writing. This bad weather may prevent his travelling."

"Yes, perhaps that is it. But I told him how frightened I was, and if he were not ill, surely he would have written."

"He has scarcely had time to get that letter yet, madame, only think." And Fanchette began counting on her fingers the number of days since it had been posted.

"Ah! perhaps so," Agnes said, and then, without observing that she interrupted Fanchette's not very rapid arithmetic, added, "I must wind my watch; I left it on the drawing-room table; will you bring it?"

Fanchette stopped her finger-reckoning instantly, and went out; as she crossed the landing, a sound in the hall attracted her. She was quick-eared and curious, so she went down a step or two of the stairs, and looked over into the hall.

"Ah, madame!" she exclaimed, drawing back, and hurrying into her mistress's room, "did I not tell you right? Monsieur is in the hall."

"You are not serious?" her mistress said, rising, with her face all in a glow.

"Let madame look," the girl answered triumphantly. "I saw monsieur over the stairs, therefore madame can see him too."

It did not need a second suggestion: in a moment, Agnes was straining over the balusters into the hall below; and there, as her maid had said, she saw Villeret. How warmly she greeted him! so warmly that she did not feel the chilly return he gave her. But Fanchette, who stood behind, saw it all. She had grown wiser by the lesson about the duel, and resolved to say nothing, at least to her mistress; but as soon as Agnes and her husband had disappeared into the drawing-room, she went down to repeat her thoughts to Wilhelm, whose admiration for her was alive yet, although it had not taken a matrimonial form.

When they were in the drawing-room, Agnes flung on more wood, and the fire, which had not gone down much, soon blazed and crackled.

"It was a bitter night for you to come so far, George. Are you very cold?" she asked.

She knelt beside his chair, holding out his hands to the blaze, and cluding them.

"Yes, I am very cold, but that fine fire will soon banish it. There," he added, withdrawing his hands from hers, and holding them nearer the fire, "that is better—I'll be warm presently."

She began talking of his absence, of his silence, of how uneasy she had been, and how unhappy, while he was away. He kept looking into the fire, and not at her, when he answered, pleading urgent business for the delay in his arrival, and his daily expectation of coming, as an excuse for not writing; and then he tried to change the conversation, by asking her questions about herself, her occupations and amusements during his absence.

"Ah, George! you forget one thing," she said at last, looking up into his face at he bent forward towards the fire.

"What, Agnes?"

She seemed disappointed, and her lip quivered a little.

"You forget to ask for baby?"

"Ah, yes; how is he? will you forgive my not thinking of it before?" he said, as if ashamed of such flagrant forgetfulness.

He turned his face fully round to her as he answered, and she started when she observed, for the first time, how haggard it was. His neglect of the child was remembered no longer; she rose to her feet, saying anxiously:

"Were you ill, George, while you were away? You look so wretched."

"No, no," he said moodily, again turning his face from her towards the fire; "not ill, but anxious and worried. But tell me about the child: has he grown much since I went to England?"

"O yes," she replied, with all a mother's pride in her face; "he is growing so big, and so pretty, and so like you, George."

She put her arm round his neck, and drew his head over to her. He moved it away a little, but without disturbing her arm. He was inwardly impatient under her caress, yet half afraid to show it. She put over her other hand, and twined it through his hair, after her old habit. As she drew out the curls upon her fingers, two long white threads shone glittering in the dark hair. She looked closer at him, closer still, and she saw other silver traces of those anxious weeks or months since he left her. His hair was glossy black when they had parted.

"George, darling, you have had some heavy trouble since you went away; it is turning your hair gray!"

"O, gray hairs are honorable, and I mean to cultivate them. What a ridiculous girl you are!" he said, with an effort to laugh. He took the hairs from her, and flung them in the grate. "I know you have all manner of fancies in your head this moment. Trust me, the trouble was not as great as you imagine. There, now don't press so heavily on me; don't you see I am too tired to support your weight?"

He moved away his head from her hand, and his neck from her other arm. She said nothing, but went over a little way from him, and sat down. But she did not see the subtle, secret working of his heart; she read the surface only, and thought that he was fatigued and irritable. Villeret looked round at her after awhile, and saw that her face was very pale.

"I am tired and captious to-night," he said, apologetically. "I'll be in better humor to-morrow."

"I hope so," was all she replied.

"Is it not late?" he asked, without noticing her reply.

"Yes, after eleven. Would you like to go to bed, or will you have some supper?" Her momentary anger was cooling fast.

"I can't sleep well now at night; I'll try to read awhile. Have you a paper?"

She rose and handed him one, and then lighted the lamp which stood upon the table.

"You need not lose your rest waiting up for me," he observed, as he unfolded it. "You are not accustomed to late hours."

"No, but I don't like to leave you alone," she said, and then going over to him, added after a moment's hesitation, "You are not well, I know you are not well."

"Yes, quite well now. You are actually silly in your anxiety, Agnes. Here now, good-night."

"He held out his hand to her; she took it, then stooping down to him, kissed his forehead. Her lips lingered a moment upon it, but he moved away his head, pushing his chair towards the table.

"You will not be cross with me any more, George?" she said, stopping for a moment at the door.

"No," he answered, trying to smile, and then he looked down at the paper, and began to read.

She waited another instant, hoping he would speak again, but he continued reading without noticing her, and when she saw that he did not even look up, she opened the door and went out.

[COMPLETED IN THREE MORE NUMBERS.]

## **GEOFFREY THE LOLLARD.**

### **CHAPTER X.**

#### **THE BIRDS FLOWN TO THE MOUNTAINS.**

THE sun had risen high before any of the soldiers awoke, and even then they were helpless till their still sleeping comrade, who was to be their deliverer, should be aroused. This was at last accomplished by one of the men, who dragged himself along the floor so as to give him a hearty kick, but it was still some time before he came sufficiently to himself to comprehend the situation of affairs and release both himself and the others.

The first thing that their captain did, after he had stretched his stiffened limbs,

was to discharge a volley of oaths at them, the Lollards, and the world generally. He had determined not to relate the whole of his midnight adventure to his men for two reasons: one was, that he was afraid of rousing their superstitious fears, and making them insist upon leaving instantly a place which they would surely believe to be haunted by malignant spirits; and the other was, that he was a little ashamed of being thus caught napping by his enemies, and did not wish the story to be told against him to his superior officer. He was, however, fully determined to ransack the castle before the time fixed upon by the Lollards for

their departure, at the same time guarding all the places of exit.

He met with no better success than the day before; but soon a bright thought struck him, and his face glowed with malignant pleasure. He ordered his men into the woods to gather brushwood, and this, together with some straw and grain, he piled up in the apartments of the castle and set on fire. When it was fairly blazing, he mounted his whole troop, carefully removing all the horses from the stables, and placed his men in such positions that they might be able to watch all the roads, and be ready for instant pursuit should the Lollards attempt to flee.

He himself sat grimly on his war-horse, surveying the work of destruction; waiting till the noble men, smoked like rats from their holes, should be seized and brought triumphantly before him. He already imagined how he would dispose of the reward when he presented the three heads to the archbishop.

If this gallant soldier had been able to look downward a little way through the ground under his feet, his vision would not have been quite so rose-colored. Let us go back to the three men whom we left sleeping so quietly in the little turret-chamber.

They were not aroused from their slumber till the fire had begun to rage, for they were so imbedded in the stone that the heat and smell took a long time to penetrate to them; but at last the ivy on the outside caught, and the flames were roaring "from turret to foundation-stone." The smoke which then poured in through the arrow slits aroused Bertrand, who soon understood the plot. It was with great difficulty that he and De Forest could get Lord Cobham through the narrow passages, for they were all almost suffocated with smoke, and the heat in some places was nearly unbearable. In more than one spot the walls had fallen in and choked the way with rubbish, but fortunately the soldiers were all outside, guarding the blazing ruins, so that they could pass easily through some of the more open rooms, and so into the vaults. Here they rested awhile, but not long, for they feared

lest some arch should give way and cut off their retreat. They therefore passed along the subterranean passage mentioned in the first part of the story, which opened in the direction of the road they intended to take.

They were in doubt where they should procure horses for their journey, but their trusty friend and servant, Charles Bertrand, had a plan in his head which he did not at first communicate to his master; but leaving them sitting on a block of stone in the passage, he crept through the little door concealed by brushwood, and closing it carefully behind him, stole along the bed of the stream, and then up the bank, on his hands and knees. All this was done without noise, and he crouched down in the bushes not ten feet from the spot where the captain sat on his horse, indulging in his day-dreams.

Presently the soldier dismounted, and began to examine the animal. "Not a bad brute!" was his muttered comment, as he noticed the fine muscular development of his chest and the fire of his eye; "not a bad brute, nor an ugly one, and far too good for an heretic to ride. I have not had a better mount for years; and as for you," he added, bestowing a kick on his own abandoned charger, which had been degraded to the office of carrying some of the plunder from the castle, "you shall henceforth carry my wife, Ivan, to market, when she wears the new red cloak which I shall buy her in London; she is a good dame, and a handsome one too, and——"

What further plans were in his head for the benefit of himself and wife, can never be known; for just at that moment there was a shout in the direction of the burning building, and he, thinking that the rats had at last been smoked out of their hiding-places, did not stop to ride round by the road, but, hooking the horses' bridles on a branch, he flung himself down the steep bank in the direction of the castle, shouting to his men to "save them alive."

Charles Bertrand chuckled with glee at the turn things had taken. It took but a moment to loosen the beasts, cut the pack

from the one, and lead them both down into the wood. He then gave a whistle, and in a shorter time than it takes to relate it, Sir John was mounted on his own horse, Cobham on the captain's discarded steed, with Bertrand behind him, and all were spurring forward toward the blue mountains, whose snow-capped peaks invited them to a safe and happy asylum.

The chances were much against Ivan's ever riding to market on the old gray war-horse, decked in the scarlet cloak purchased by the price of the three Lollard heads!

For a mile or so both horses went at full speed, Sir John's steed urged on by his master's voice, and the trooper's abused charger showing itself not much the worse for wear, by carrying double almost as fast as the other bore single weight. They had need of all their exertions, for they had not been off more than fifteen minutes before the whole band was in pursuit of them. They gained a little time, however, by their pursuers taking a wrong road, and it was not long before the November twilight closed suddenly upon them, aiding still more their concealment in the gloom of the forest.

It was nearly midnight before they dismounted, and then, though wearied with their journey, and chilled by the sleet which had fallen during the last few hours, the place at which they stopped did not seem at all likely to afford them any one of the travelers' three requirements—bed, food, and fire. All seemed to be well acquainted with the spot. It was an old ruin of what had probably been a fine house in the days of Henry the First, but which had been destroyed, like many another, and its owner's name blotted from existence during the wars of Stephen. Bertrand dismounted, and led the horses carefully among the stones, into what had been the courtyard of the castle. There he sheltered them under some broken arches, while their riders entered a low room, still left almost entire, but so situated that a careless person passing by, would fail to distinguish it from the masses of rubbish by which it was surrounded.

The air within was damp and chilly; but De Forest pulled aside a loose stone

in the wall, and from the recess behind it drew out some fagots of dry wood, a pitcher of common wine, a loaf of bread, and some hard Welsh cheese. A cheerful fire was soon blazing on the stone floor, after De Forest had hung his cloak over the opening by which they entered, for the double purpose of keeping the cold air from blowing on the backs of those within, and the firelight from revealing itself to those who might be without. Then, after warming their benumbed limbs, they were quite ready to do justice to the simple fare.

This ruin was one of the meeting-places of the Lollards. Wales being their great asylum, it was convenient to have some spot a little beyond the foot of the mountains, where they might come, and find out whether it was safe to proceed any farther. There was always a small stock of provisions and fire-wood kept there, so that in case any preachers were obliged to spend the night there, they might not have to endanger themselves or others by venturing to any of the neighboring cottages. There was also a set of signals here, conducted on the same system, and connected with those at the foot of the oak near Forest Castle, and Bertrand carefully deciphered them and arranged them anew. He learned that the road was clear as far as the mountains for those going thither, but that no one from the mountains had better venture down. He then placed such marks as would indicate to those who should read them the number of the archbishop's soldiers, the burning of the Tower, and the escape of De Forest and Cobham. So perfectly had this system of signals been arranged, and so well was their secret kept, that he knew in a few days the news of the escape of the two reformers would be known and rejoiced over by all the Lollards for many miles around, while their enemies would wonder how the intelligence was spread, and lay it all to the account of that diabolical assistance and knowledge of sorcery, which they firmly believed was possessed by these outlaws.

Before they retired to their rest, Cobham stood up and recited the ninety-first

Psalm: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." How true and precious did these promises appear to those homeless fugitives! Each took to his own heart such passages as seemed most appropriate to his own particular case; but each found in them the same great comfort—the blessed fact of God's guardianship over those he loves, and their absolute and eternal safety, however earthly cares may oppress, dangers threaten, or sorrows impend. The soldier, Cobham, realized in the God whom he had learned to worship untrammelled by priestcraft and juggling tricks, a shield and buckler far stronger than he had ever borne in the wars under king Harry. The gray-haired knight, who had that day seen the home where his ancestors had lived and died, the birth-place of himself and his two sons, the inheritance which he had thought to leave to a long line of posterity, razed to the very ground by his enemies, and who now felt that he had no home in the wide world in which to shelter his gray hairs, crept up, as it were, to the promise, "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, in him will I trust," and with child-like faith, taking his Heavenly Father at his word, cast away his sorrows and cares.

Bertrand, the peasant, who had abandoned the old faith and followed his feudal lord into the new, but who had never imbibed the spirituality of the reform; who had cast aside the bondage of Rome, but who had not yet bowed his head to the yoke of the gentle Jesus; felt that night as he never had done before, and his aroused feelings were never quieted until he came, with no priestly mediator between, to the feet of his Saviour, and found peace in believing.

Nor was the impression lessened when Sir John poured forth a simple, earnest prayer to their great Protector. There was no word of complaint in it, still less of anger toward their persecutors. He besought, with earnest pleadings, that as they were now Sauls in persecuting, they might become Pauls in defending the faith. And when the thought of his

ruined home and desolate possessions came across his mind, he prayed that those mansions might be bestowed upon his enemies as well as himself, which are not made with hands, and whose treasures no moth nor rust can corrupt, no foe break through and steal.

Then they laid them down and slept, calmly and peacefully, for so did they realize God's presence, that the rough stone walls seemed to them like the fingers of his almighty hand, stretched around them to guard them from their foes.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LESSON OF FORGIVENESS.

WHEN Charles Bertrand—for he it was who was their stranger guest—had further narrated how, the next day, the two Lollards had easily passed over the few miles that lay between their night's resting-place and Cobham's mountain retreat in that wild country which gave asylum to outlaws of every kind, he told them that Sir John still had his habitation in Wales, but frequently ventured down into the valleys of his own land, traversing several counties under various disguises, to attend and encourage meetings of the Reformers. Patiently they were all waiting for the time when, bursting over the land as the sunbeams after a thunder-cloud has passed, Bible truth, liberty, and toleration should make themselves to be known and acknowledged by the world. Patiently and trustingly they waited, for they had no doubt of the fulfillment of their Master's promises; but, alas! it pleased that Master, whose will must be unquestioned by human intellect, long, very long to delay the deliverance which was yet surely to come. The child that was then at its mother's breast grew up to boyhood, manhood, descended to old age, and then returned to his native dust, long ere that day came which those fond, simple hearts believed to be even then at the dawn. The nation was not yet sufficiently purged, men's faith not sufficiently tried; that precious "seed of the church," the blood of holy martyrs, had not yet finished dropping into the earth, nor had it yet been sufficiently watered



by widows' and orphans' tears for the precious harvest to spring up, which now is yielding to every soul speaking the English tongue, the priceless boon of perfect liberty of conscience toward man, and toward God.

Bertrand was glad to stretch his limbs by the hut fire after his journey; and after the simple worship, which always closed the day's labor of these people, all betook themselves to rest.

All but one. Geoffrey could not sleep; so he arose softly, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, bounded up the cliffs by a path so narrow and rocky, and close to the brink of the precipice, that only so firm and steady a foot as his own would care to tread it by night. As he passed out of the shadow of the cottage, a man lifted up his head from behind some bushes, and shook himself as though wearied of a confined posture. Still, he did not stand boldly upright, but crouched again, keeping in the shade, and then throwing a look of malignant hatred at the little hut and its quiet sleepers, he muttered an oath of satisfaction, and crept stealthily upon the boy's track.

Meanwhile, what were the thoughts of the young Lollard?

Geoffrey and Hubert were both Lollards, but in a very different spirit. Geoffrey, the heir of a noble baronetcy, saw his patrimony destroyed, his father outlawed and hunted, himself dependent on the charity of the poor for a place of shelter, and his very soul went out in opposition to the oppressors and to their religion. In Lollardism he found a freedom which agreed with his notions of right, and a purity of morals suited to his taste. The younger brother embraced the reformed religion, because he found in the doctrines it taught, a way of relief for a sinning soul—because they brought to him, free, and untrammelled by superstition and the traditions of men, the Gospel of the Cross, "the sweet story of old." Geoffrey was a Lollard, because with all his strength he hated Rome, and desired to break its yoke from the necks of his countrymen; Hubert, because he loved Jesus, and longed, with all the fervor of his spirit, to

convey the tidings of deliverance from a far greater power than that wielded in the Vatican, to the priest-ridden, ignorant poor of his native land.

It was natural, therefore, that the former should have many a bitter thought rising in his mind as he thought of the smouldering ruins of Forest Tower. The insult and wrong which had been heaped upon his noble race seemed more than he could bear; his whole soul revolted against the tyranny.

"It is mine!" he cried aloud, as he reached the top of the cliff, and drew his fine though boyish figure up to its full height in an attitude of defiance—"mine by every law. King Henry holds his throne by no better right! I care not how strong they be, they shall give it back, or may a curse rest on them every one—may they all, from king Henry down to his hirelings, be as homeless as I am this night! Send down, O God of Justice!—if there be such a God—fire and sword upon their houses, as they have brought them on mine; curses on their meat and drink, curses——" He paused, then sank down on the ground and groaned bitterly. Had he not been so enrapt in his fiery thoughts, he might have noticed a face, peering at him with malignant satisfaction from the shadow of a rock scarce ten feet from the spot where he stood in full moonlight, with his clenched right hand raised toward heaven, calling down vengeance for his wrongs. But now, as he sank to the earth, the figure stooped and became invisible, for at that instant another footstep was heard along the path, and a still more boyish form sprang across the little open space.

"Geoffrey! dear Geoffrey!"

"What are you doing here, Hubert?" cried the elder lad, springing to his feet, like all other boys displeased at being found giving way to his emotions. "Get you back to the cottage; this is no place for you, on the mountain-top at night!"

"Do not be angry, brother!" said the younger beseechingly. "I saw you rise and go out, and I followed, it is so wild and desolate for you to be here alone, and you so miserable."



"Miserable!"—the word was spoken in a contemptuous tone—"that is for a woman to say. I am a man now, I must stand up for my lawful rights; I must pursue to the death those blood-hounds, those hirelings of the foul fiend himself, whom may Heaven——"

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey! stop; do not say such words. We may not curse, we must pray—we must bless!" And the boy clung to his brother in passionate entreaty. Geoffrey flung him off.

"You are a child, Hubert! you do not understand these things. Go back to your bed. I choose to be alone." He strode off to the furthest extremity of the little rocky platform, close, close to the lurker in the shadow! When he had styled his enemies blood-hounds, he was not far from the truth; for dearly they loved to track silently their victim's footsteps, to spring upon him when he felt most secure.

"Geoffrey," said the little pleading voice, "it is very cold, I thought you would wrap me in your cloak."

The hard, stern look passed from the lad's face at the words; he turned, sat down by his brother, and clasped him tightly in his arms. Neither spoke for some time; at last Hubert broke the silence.

"How beautiful the moonlight is to-night!"

It was indeed a glorious sight. Sheer down two hundred feet and more below them lay the calm, mirror-like sea, reflecting the moonbeams in a pathway of silver, stretching far, far into the horizon, till it ended in a distant speck on the great North Sea. The stars were paled by the radiance, but still stood out gloriously in the clear still atmosphere, like specks of shining foam dashed up from the silvery sea below. No sound broke the stillness but the low beating of the surf, and the scream of a sea-bird skimming through the air after its prey. It seemed in that lone, desolate spot as if there might be no other living creature in existence but the bird flitting across the landscape. The two lads nestled under the cloak and—the watcher!

"The moon was at the full, you know, when He died, Geoffrey, and fell upon his cross and his tomb. I wonder if it falls as brightly in that far-off land as it does here? Father Humphrey told me all about it the last time the moon was full, just before he died. How sad, and yet how glad a thing it was for Christ to die, Geoffrey! I can hardly tell where the sadness ends and the gladness begins, they seem so mingled in it all. May I talk to you about it now?"

"Yes, if you are warm," and the arm was drawn more tightly around the slender form.

"Oh! yes, I am so comfortable now;" and then he began, and in sweet, touching eloquence detailed the well-known story of the persecuted Nazarene. He drew the picture of the lowly manger, of the carpenter's workshop; he spoke of Him as homeless, hungry, thirsty, weary, desolate, despised, rejected, betrayed. He followed him to the garden, the judgment-hall, the cross. He described in burning words the gibes, the mocks, the sneers, the insults, the cruelty, the hatred that followed the meek and gentle Jesus from the cradle to the grave.

"And He forgave them, Geoffrey," said the little speaker, as he closed the account, "he forgave them every one."

"He was a God," said Geoffrey solemnly.

"Yes, but he was a man too, and out of his man's heart, as well as his God's heart, he forgave them."

The elder lad's face had softened strangely; there was a moisture on the lashes which shaded his downcast eyes.

"He taught us our 'Pater Noster.' He had a right to teach us to say: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.' It is hard to act it, but then we must, for we have so many sins to be forgiven—so very, very many, Geoffrey. I think it is an awful prayer to say, though it is so simple and short. It is like Jesus himself, so perfect, so heart-searching. I tremble often; for just think, if we should have just the least little revenge in our hearts, we are praying for condemnation."

Lower, lower on his bosom sank the proud head of the young noble. "I said it to-night, Hubert," the words came in a trembling whisper. "Then you must act it, quickly, quickly, before God answers it against you." The boy had roused himself, and in his eagerness had caught both his brother's hands in an earnest grasp. What Geoffrey would have replied to this appeal can not be known, for just at that moment there was a rustling among the stones, then the rush of a falling body, accompanied by one of those horrible screams of mortal agony, which those who have once heard them can never forget.

Both boys sprang to their feet with a cry of horror. Geoffrey's clear, cool head first comprehended what was the matter. He ran as near the border of the precipice as he dared, and then, creeping on his hands and knees to the very edge, looked down. There, far below him, but as far above the water, caught in a scrubby tree that grew out of a cleft in the rock, lay a dark object, only just discernible in the moonlight; and again came the cry for help, but feebler than before.

"It is a man over the cliff!" shouted the boy. "Run, Hubert, for Bertrand and a rope; quick, or it will be too late! He is hanging in the elf oak!"

Then, when his brother was gone, he shouted words of encouragement to the unfortunate man. "Hold hard, man! help is near, and the tree strong, but trust not to the upper branch, it is a dead one; hold fast but a little while."

The man was in too great a state of terror to hear or understand, but kept exclaiming that he was lost, and vowing candles to every saint in the calendar, and pilgrimages to a dozen shrines; but his voice grew fainter and fainter, and had ceased entirely, before Hubert returned, accompanied by Humphrey Singleton and Bertrand. It took but a moment to uncoil the rope and fasten one end around a rock; then Geoffrey hailed the stranger:

"Ho! friend, help has come; courage! We will send you down a rope; have you strength to tie it round your body?"

No reply came. All shouted together,

and then waited breathlessly for an answer, but none came.

"He is dead or he has swooned," said the old master; "may the Lord have mercy on his soul! We can do no more." Meanwhile there had been a tumult of varied feelings in Geoffrey's mind. Who can this stranger be? had been naturally his first thought when he saw the accident. There could be but one answer—it was an enemy; none other would have been concealed at such an hour on those lonely cliffs. One of Chicheley's spies must have been lurking behind the rocks, and, missing his footing, had fallen to what must be his certain destruction if not speedily rescued. And this was the man whom certain feelings of humanity in his heart were calling on him to save, at the risk of his own life—one of the very men, perhaps, who had aided in making his father a homeless outlaw; nay more, who had been but a few moments before, thirsting for the blood of himself and his venerable protector. Was it not the dictate of common prudence which incited him to send a cross-bow bolt after the wretch, rather than rescue him to go on in the commission of crime?

But however passionate Geoffrey might be when roused by a sense of his wrongs, in his calmer moments he was always ready to be led by the Bible's laws of right and wrong, which had been taught him from his infancy. "Thou shalt not do evil that good may come," was a precept which had been impressed upon him by his father's lips more than once, and now the conversation he had just held with his brother brought a still more forcible argument to his mind. "He died for them even while they were murdering him." "Forgive us our sins; as we forgive them who sin against us." He was decided: he would, as Hubert had said, act the prayer, and in a moment—for it took him far less time to think all this than it has to relate it—he stepped forward, and flung his loose cloak out of the way.

"Nay, father, there is yet hope; I will go down and help him."

"You!" exclaimed the old master and Bertrand in a breath. "Boy, you are mad!

It is almost certain death; and know you not that this is without doubt a spy, sent to hunt all of us to the scaffold?"

"He is a fellow-man," replied the boy undauntedly, "and a sinner too; perchance his soul may be hanging over the gulf of perdition, as his body is over yonder ocean. If it please God"—here he raised his cap reverently from his brow, then flung it down on the ground—"if it please God, I will save both!"

He then stepped toward Hubert, and bending low so that he might not be overheard by the rest, said: "Brother, I am going to act the prayer; you have saved me from the vengeance of God!" There was one tight grasp of the hand, and then, before they had sufficiently recovered from their surprise to prevent him, Geoffrey had seized the rope and commenced his perilous descent.

The next few moments, so full of agonizing suspense, were spent by Bertrand in pushing bunches of dried grass under the rope, to prevent it from cutting against the sharp corners of the rock, and by the rest in prayer. The dangerous descent was not quite unknown to the young Lollard, as but a week or two previous he had climbed down to that very tree to pick up a bird which he shot, and which had lodged in its branches; hence his warning to the man to beware of the dead bough. But then he had had the light and heat of the sun at noonday; now he must guide himself over slippery rocks by the uncertain light of the moon, which, glaring on the patches of snow, served only to render the shadows deeper; still the boy, naturally fearless, was now inspired with a supernatural bravery by the holy thoughts in his soul. Every sense was stretched to its utmost; with firm hands he grasped the rope, and with unerring feet sprang from rock to rock with a speed and sureness of footing which seemed to those who watched him from above almost miraculous, till at last he sent up a joyful shout:

"I am safe, and the man is only stunned; but send us down another rope, and that speedily, for the tree is loosening."

The rope was not so readily procured;

and for some time the boy had to remain in the tree called the "elf oak" by the people around, on account of the strangeness of its situation, and support the moaning wretch who lay there, and whom his voice had recalled a little to life. He occupied himself by chafing the man's limbs, and striving to regulate their weight so as to press as little as possible on the tree, which, jarred by the fall of the heavy body upon it, was becoming more and more loosened from its frail tenure in the crevices of the rock.

At length the other rope was dropped to him, and he fastened both round the man, who seemed incapable, either through terror or injury, of giving himself much assistance. Then, supporting himself partly by the rope, but more by clinging to the jutting points of rock, with a hand ever ready to steady the swinging body or turn it aside from a dangerous angle, he clambered up, and then sank down on the grass, wounded, dizzy, and exhausted, but with a strange calmness at his heart, and a great love burning there toward all mankind, and an intense feeling of gratitude toward God for his preservation from a danger whose full horrors he only now began to understand; for, just as he was mounting the last few feet of the ascent, he had heard a crash behind him—the old oak had torn itself from the rock, and was being dashed in fragments by the surf below.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CAUGHT AND CAGED.

THE man whom Geoffrey had saved, was indeed his greatest enemy. He was no other than the captain of the troop who had so lately burned Forest Castle and driven its lord into exile. Enraged at losing the reward which he had considered already his own, and mortified beyond expression at finding himself outwitted by the despised Lollards, he had found the traces of Bertrand like a bloodhound, and having followed them so far, had discovered the retreat of the children of his enemy.

Bertrand recognized him the moment the blood and dust were wiped from his

face, and nothing but the positive command of his master's son prevented him from killing him on the spot. Still all precautions must be taken for their safety, and they bound their prisoner securely, placing him in an out-house near the hut, while they prepared every thing for instant flight. Their precious pages of Scripture were divided among them and concealed in their garments. Such of the old man's few effects as they could not carry with them they buried or concealed, and partook of a hasty meal.

Their plan was to leave sufficient food and firewood near their prisoner to last him till he should recover or his friends come to seek him. For this purpose Bertrand went to carry him meat, but returned in a moment with a face expressive of mingled wonder and alarm.

"He is gone!" he exclaimed. "Gone, and we are undone! Why did I not strike him down at first? Fool that I was! why did you hinder me, master Geoffrey? We are indeed lost if he escape, for his band is but a short league off in the village. He may have had time to warn them even now;" and Charles Bertrand sprang to the door, cross-bow in hand; but when there, he stopped. Gleaming in the gray twilight which was heralding the morning, he saw the spears of quite a numerous band of soldiers approaching the hill on which the hut stood, from three sides, slowly but surely compassing their prey.

"It is too late," he added more calmly; and in a whisper to Geoffrey, who had followed him, "*We* might by a rare chance break through—but not *those*;" and he pointed with the butt of his weapon to the old man, exhausted with the labors and excitement of the night, and Hubert, pale and unused to hardship.

"Go you, trusty Charles," said the boy, grasping the rough hand of the man-at-arms in both his; "I knew not that I had periled their life and yours as well as mine own; go you alone by the rocky path; it lies still in shadow, and they will not see it. I stay to die with them."

"Hold, young master," said the man, affecting a rough manner to conceal his emotion; "you do not know Charles Ber-

trand if you think he will basely flee and leave the old man and the child to perish alone, not counting the heir of his lord's house. Nay, I will stay and bring down more than one of the wretches ere they cross the threshold."

"Not so, friend," said the young Lollard. "You have not my permission; for my father's sake, you must escape to tell him of our fate, and beside, you, being free, may do somewhat for our liberty in planning some way of escape, while you can do us no good by shooting down one or two of yonder troop. I command you to follow yonder path to the first turning, then to the right, till you see a rock like a horse's head, then, ten paces to the left, is a bush growing close to the cliff. Pull it away, and there is a hole large enough for one to lie concealed. Go, Bertrand; there is not a moment to lose, do not say a word."

The man looked still reluctant; but there was such an air of decision in the flashing eye of the young man, that he could not disobey, but bounding up the hillside, disappeared as Geoffrey turned to the hut.

"Up, father!" he said in a firm voice, lending his arm to the old man, at the same time motioning Hubert to his side. "Father! you have taught us how to live as Lollards and Christians; now teach us to die like them, for the time is come!" and he led them out to the rocky platform in front of the door.

Scarcely had he ended, when a dozen men leapt up to the top of the hill, and as many hands were laid on their unresisting victims, while the morning air was filled with their shouts of delight at their cowardly victory. Some tied them securely, some went to search for the missing soldier, while others threw fire-brands about the hut and set it on fire.

Then, driving the boys before them, but disregarding old Humphrey Singleton as a piece of worthless booty, they descended the hill toward the village, where they had left their horses. There each of the boys was fastened to a horse behind a soldier, and by the time the sun had risen they were on their way toward York.

The captain, while looking with the utmost care to the safety of his prisoners, kept as far as possible from the boy whose kindness he was so shamefully repaying. Though his heart was pretty well steeled by many years of rough service as a soldier of fortune, and he was deeply impressed with the hatred of the Reformers which pervaded all classes, yet he had a little conscience left, and it pricked him sharply when he looked on the sea, and thought that but for that lad's strong arm and courageous heart he would there be dashing about a lifeless, mangled mass. His better angel whispered to him that he might still partially retrieve his error by using his influence with his band to let them escape; but then rose the thought of the disgrace which the escape of Sir John and Lord Cobham had thrown upon him, which could only be atoned for by the capture of these "whelps of rebellion," as the archbishop styled them. Besides, his greedy palm itched for the golden angels which he already saw poured out to him by the delighted ecclesiastics.

So at last he determined to divide matters with his troublesome conscience. He would not take them to York, where they would certainly be killed, but would leave them at a convent near by, where they might not be kept very safely, and thus escape without the odium resting on him, or the loss of his reward. He therefore ordered his troop to turn into a side-road, and galloping on before, led them to a gloomy, fortified building, surrounded by thick woods, and known to all as the convent of "Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows."

The portress looked surprised and a little doubtful at the sight of such a band of armed men; but the archbishop's livery, worn by some of his retainers, and the assurance of the captain that he came on holy business, procured them an audience with the head of the establishment.

Mother Beatrice, the prioress, was a tall, dark, hard-featured woman, who, being an importation from Spain, had brought with her all the austerities to which she had been accustomed from her

childhood, and meted them out with unsparing hand to the nuns, novices, and pupils over whom she exercised her sway, and soon made the convent as famous for the rigor of its discipline, as she herself was for sanctity and devotion to the Church.

It seemed as though there was scarcely an hour in the twenty-four in which the clanging of the bell did not arouse the luckless inmates to repair to the chapel for prayers, and woe to any who were so unfortunate as to break any one of the strict rules of the house, for the slightest punishment of the abbess was a thing to be dreaded. Perhaps it was to lie for hours stretched in the form of a cross on the cold pavement of the cell or chapel; to stand in a painful posture before some shrine, till the offender fainted from weariness; to go day after day with the least possible quantity of the coarsest food that could keep soul and body together; or perhaps, in extreme cases, the holy lady would herself apply the scourge to the naked back of the criminal, accompanying each blow by a pious exhortation, or a passage in the life of a saint, until both voice and hand were too wearied to perform their part any longer.

"And now, daughter," she would say, as her victim was led away, "go in peace; may this slight correction save thee from the pains of hell! Go in peace, and forget not in thy prayers to thank Our Lady and the saints that thou hast been placed here, where thy soul is so well cared for!"

It was quite doubtful whether the offender ever experienced the gratitude which was expected of her for the benefits received at the reverend Lady's hand, but it was thought that Mother Beatrice quite enjoyed these little opportunities for doing good, and either found, or made them, as often as possible.

It was after one of these occasions, when she was resting from the benevolent fatigue she had just undergone, that the portress came bustling in, with an unusual air of excitement, to inform her of the arrival of the captain and his men.

The abbess received the soldier with

the cold dignity befitting her situation; but as soon as she had heard the story, her heart palpitated with joy and triumph, in a manner quite unusual to one covered with the serge robe of her order. Her ruling passion was for governing, and forcing those around her to an absolute subjection to her will; and she had lately begun to weary of the contracted scope given to her powers in this quiet convent. The sins which she was called upon to punish were, after all, mere peccadilloes, and her subjects were so subdued by severity that there was no hope of a serious enough rebellion among them to excite her faculties in putting it down; but here were intrusted to her two heretics, made all the more interesting by being of the opposite sex, and yet not old enough to bring a scandal upon the convent if it received them within its walls. She promised the captain to do all she could to draw from them the secret of their father's hiding-place and that of Lord Cobham, and to keep them safely till the archbishop, who was then in London, should return, and decide what was to be done with them.

When the captain and his troop had departed, she ordered her prisoners to be brought into her presence. The boys had at first been rather rejoiced at the thought of being placed under female care, but one look at their stern jailer was sufficient to alarm them. Hubert shrank to his brother's side, but Geoffrey drew himself up proudly, and returned her scrutiny by an unabashed and not very polite stare.

The wily prioress noticed this, and determined that they were very different characters, and as such must be differently treated. "Come hither, my pretty boy," she said, throwing as much tenderness as possible into her voice; and, drawing him gently toward her, she questioned him concerning his journey and his fatigue in such a way that his answers, at first confined to monosyllables, became more full, and he was soon talking with her quite freely, unheeding the signs by which Geoffrey, who was standing moodily by the door, tried to check him. At that moment, the convent-bell

pealed out its summons, and the abbess, arising, said, "Come, my little page; we will go to hear some of that music you were just telling me you loved so dearly;" and before the elder lad had time to put in a word, the superior and her charge had left the room. As the door closed behind her, another opened, and the portress, entering, bade him follow her. He obeyed, though secretly determined not to be led to chapel, as he conceived Hubert must have been. His fears were groundless, as he soon discovered. It was not the abbess's plan to try him that way. He followed his guide through several passages and courts to a low damp-looking cell, and when sister Ursula had shown him the pitcher of water and piece of bread for his refreshment, that were placed in a niche serving for a table, she withdrew, and bolting the door, left him to his own reflections.

His first impulse was to examine his prison. The only light admitted was from a small window, or rather slit in the wall, which was well barred; and it was not till his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the dim light, that he found he was in a good-sized room, some twenty feet square, and built entirely of stone. It had evidently been originally intended for a cellar; but that it had sometime been used as a prison was also evident, as there was a chain fastened to the wall, and the door was strong, and well provided with bolts and bars. On a shelf covered with cloth, at the side, stood a crucifix, and behind it hung a rude sketch of the Virgin, with the legend, "Ora pro nobis, peccavi!" in black letter. The boy gave a scornful glance at this, and then threw himself down on the heap of straw in the corner intended for his bed.

At first he buried his face in his hands in anxious thought, but soon started up, and began a careful examination of the walls and floor of his prison. His object was this. In the arrangements for flight at the hut on the cliff the preceding night, it will be remembered that the sheets of parchment containing parts of the Bible had been divided among the party. Geoffrey's share he carried in a bag under the

cloth jerkin that he wore, and he was afraid lest the prioress should undertake to search him, and so discover those precious pages, which he would then not only lose forever, but which would prove witnesses sufficient to send him, without further question, to the stake. He therefore wished to find some place where he might secrete them, if a search seemed probable.

In the darkest corner of the room, partly concealed by a recess, he found a door, which had evidently, by the cobwebs gathered thickly over it, not been opened for a long time. Induced by the decayed appearance of the wood, he applied his shoulder to it, and one forcible push sent it bursting in, and nearly choked him with dust. At first his heart beat high, for he thought he had found a way of escape; but he was soon disappointed. It only opened into what seemed to have been an entrance or vestibule to the old cellar, for there were marks where some steps had been fastened into the wall; and a door-way, half-way up the side, had been built up with a different kind of stone. The walls were, however, much thinner, and the window larger. After making himself sure that there was no way to it except through the outer cell, he placed his parchments in a crevice under the window and returned to the other room, replacing the door so as to make all look as much as possible as it did before.

He had now time to consider his situation, which was by no means a promising one. He had noticed the deep ditch and massive wall which surrounded the building as he approached it, and the character of the place was better known to him than the prioress had supposed. He knew there were other ways of riding the kingdom of heretics beside the open trial and public execution. He also knew that he and his brother would be especial objects of interest to the ecclesiastical authority, as it might be supposed that they could be induced to reveal the place of their father's retreat, or even draw him from his concealment, if he heard that his children were held as hostages for his appearance. He saw that

great exertions would be made for their conversion, and he was very angry with Hubert for being so easily entrapped and led away, and he imagined him subjected to all kinds of questioning before he had opportunity to warn him how to answer so as to conceal most perfectly their secrets. He had worked himself into such a passion with the child for his "singing folly," as he termed it, that when the bolts were suddenly drawn back, the door opened, and his brother ran and threw himself sobbing into his arms, he repulsed him rudely and contemptuously, and began walking up and down the room, too angry to speak.

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" began the child in a trembling voice, springing up from the straw where the elder's rough push had sent him, but not daring to approach the irritated lad, "Geoffrey! I did not kneel, I did not kiss the image, though they told me they would let us go in the garden if I would, and the portress says they will kill us soon. O brother! don't send me away; we always said we would die together!"

"They may kill me, but not you, Hubert," replied Geoffrey with a sneer. "They will rather keep you for one of their singing-birds; after that, you may be a fat monk, and, who knows? his Lordship of Canterbury one of those days, and light up the land with Lollard bonfires perhaps; but"—he stopped suddenly, and sprang to his brother's side, changing his tone from harshness and sarcasm to tenderness and anxiety—"but they have done you hurt; they have wounded you, the hounds! Why did you not tell me? You are bleeding fast!"

The blood was indeed trickling down the child's pale face and mingling with his tears, while he was vainly endeavoring to stanch it with his hands.

"It is not much," he sobbed; "she struck me with her keys, because I called out to such a pretty young lady who passed us as we came out of chapel. I am sure we saw her in London at the preaching in the brickyard. She was walking with the nuns, and looked very much surprised to see me; but they hur-

ried her away, and then the portress struck me."

"There," said Geoffrey, whose rage against his brother had quite disappeared now that he had so much better an object to vent his spleen upon, "the old hag has not done you as much damage as she meant to, I think; it is but a little cut, and will scarcely leave a scar. Sit down here, and let me cover you with my cloak, and we will eat the supper our good jaileresses have provided; we have had nothing since daybreak." They were both exhausted with the fatigues and excitement of the last twenty-four hours, and their prison-fare was not much coarser than that to which they had been accustomed; so they eat it thankfully, and then lay down to rest in each other's arms.

Much more tranquil was their rest than that of their betrayer, who, tossing on his pillow in his inn at York, was suffering from remorse in a manner different from any former experience. The conversation he had overheard on the cliff; the fright of the fall; the brave face that had looked into his with compassion as he lay in the tree; that same undaunted young figure standing at the hut-door as his captors surrounded him; the patient, reproachful face which he could not help continually turning to meet during the long morning ride—all these rose up before him one after another, and not even the thought of his bag of gold pieces was able to restore the soldier's natural recklessness.



[Written for The Flag of Our Union.]  
**HEARTHSTONE TALES.**

BY CHARLES CUTTERFIELD.

**ADVENTURE IN A CAVE.**

"It is undoubtedly true, as you say, that the most perfect happiness is found in the quiet concerns of life; in the middle class, and in average activity without excitement. But you know, Willard, how I am made. I demand excitement. I live in rapturous joy or the deepest grief. Heaven made me passionate, and you calm. You curse my intensity, and I curse it myself; yet it is a part of myself, and I must live with it and die because of it. I shall take the morning boat."

"Now, Charles, you do injustice to our Minnesota scenery, and our opportunities for enjoyment, by forsaking us in this summary manner. I will tell you what it is, remain over to-morrow, if no longer, and go with me to visit the caves."

"Caves?"

"Yes, on the banks of the Mississippi. I have never visited them myself, but I am told there are some on the left bank which are truly remarkable. They are not often visited, and I long to explore them. Come, stop for this night, and if you are then determined to go, I will make no objection whatever."

"Yes sir, I will stay. If you have caves, or mountains, or anything that promises reward for exploration, I am your man."

"We shall go by small boats up the river from this point, and shall need to start early. At what hour do you breakfast?"

"Seven o'clock. Will eight answer for the start? If you choose to make it six, it is all the same to me."

"Eight will answer; and I will have everything ready."

"At precisely eight, then, you will see me coming around this bluff. I shall take my gun, my hatchet, my fishing tackle—and you will take—me."

We were ministers both of us, I spending a vacation at his request in the romantic region of the upper Mississippi, and he preaching at Minneapolis. If it sounds strangely to the reader that ministers should handle guns and fishing tackle, and engage in exploring expeditions, let it be remembered that recreation is as necessary to us as to others.

I was not tired of Minnesota, and I had not found the scenery tame. I had resolved to go down the river because Willard could not go out on the frontier with me; and I had seen the sights in the vicinity of St. Paul. The conversation was held on the levee of the city, and from that point we were to start in the morning.

It was a Minnesota morning, clear, cloudless and warm. I came around the point of the bluff at precisely eight o'clock, and found Willard waiting, with everything in readiness for a start. Between St. Anthony and St. Paul the river makes a great bend to the west and south, and three miles or more up from St. Paul stands old Fort Snelling, and the Minnesota river adds its wealth of waters to those of the Mississippi. The bluffs are almost perpendicular and very high, though in some places, indeed in most places, a stunted growth of shrubbery has got a foothold, and covers the brown surface of rock with a rich painting of the loveliest green. It is a wild glen, and the water flows rapidly through it. We fished, shot a few specimens of a kind of hawk, and searched for the cave. But no one ever went there, and the mouth of it was hid under the shrubbery, overgrown with stones. At five o'clock in the afternoon we sat down.

"Your cave is a myth, you see," I said, "and we have our journey for our pains. Now I propose that we undertake the remarkable feat of rowing this skiff up the St. Anthony Falls by moonlight."

"And I propose," said Willard, "that we build us a fire, cook fish for supper, sleep on the rocks, and look another day for the cave. And as my plan is more practicable than yours, quite as romantic, and has the merit of encouraging perseverance, I move its immediate adoption. Those in favor say aye."

Two said aye, and the plan was adopted with great unanimity.

I voted for the plan without so much as a thought whether I were in favor of it or not, but having settled the matter, entered into the spirit of the undertaking with the greatest zest. We gathered some dry branches, kindled a fire upon the stones, roasted,

broiled, fried, and did many other things to the fish, which we finally ate with great voracity, being excessively hungry, thinking all the while, however, that it wasn't a very good kind. It had a smoky taste, and a burned taste, and a raw taste, and a taste of something else—I do not know whether of ashes, as I never tasted them.

We were a couple of rods above the river, in a thick clump of bushes, and both to the right and left of us the bluff was steeper than where we were. I took a cigar from my pocket and smoked it leisurely, while Willard gave a dissertation on the abomination of ministers using tobacco. He was a better man than I, calmer, steadier, more faithful, and I knew that all he said was true; yet I smoked the cigar to assure with even more enjoyment than I had eaten my supper.

The moon came up full and glorious, silvered the smooth waters of the river below us, and put a deep shadow upon the bank opposite to where we rested. We had no bed but the rocks, and the rocks were as nearly perpendicular as it was possible for us to climb.

By dint of considerable labor Willard made him a bed of boughs, against the shrubbery, and about eleven o'clock in the evening fell asleep. I sat and pondered, gazed at the rugged scenery, listened to the flowing waters, and studied the stars. An hour passed away, and I saw a boat coming down the river with a single man at the stern. He landed just above where we had hid our boat in the bushes, pulled his way up the steep rock by the shrubbery, and disappeared. He seemed to go into the earth. Certainly I could see above the spot and on either side. He had gone into the bank, or asleep like Willard, in the shadow of the leaves. In either case I was in the mood for solving the mystery; so I crept over as cautiously as possible, moved a loose flat stone back as I would open a door, and discovered an aperture large enough for the entrance of a man.

Here, then, was the cave. I was delighted. True it was a mystery that a lone man should enter it at midnight, but even this might be perfectly in the order of nature. So I crept back again, woke Willard, and took hold of my gun.

"I have news now, I can tell you. The cave is only a few rods to our right. As I sat keeping watch by night, a man came down the river alone, climbed the bluff a few feet, and disappeared. I reasoned that if he had gone into the rocks, there must be a place to go in at. I have made the examination and found the cave."

"And you thought it worth while to wake me that I might share your joy. I thank you, of course, for your interest in my happiness, and yet if you had waited till morning it would have been better for me."

"Come, we are not going to wait till morning. Now is the accepted time, and I am going now."

"And what do you expect to see in the night? And what if your hero who entered is a robber?"

"I expect to see as much in the night as by day. Will not our torches give light by night? And if my hero is a robber, I do not see what better service two honest men can do than to carry him bound to town."

"You are a great logician, Charles, and a brave man. Since you insist upon going, of course I shall insist upon accompanying you. I don't like the idea, though, for I am sure if your hero has gone to sleep with such difficulty as did I, he will be awakened with the same indignation; in which case he must possess remarkable forbearance, or he will annihilate us entirely."

We made everything ready, and went to the mouth of the cave, careful to make as little noise as possible. I had not before thought of danger in connection with the entrance of the man, and Willard not having seen him, evidently drew the inspiration of his emotions from my own. When we left the camp fire, or the ashes of it, I had thought to go in with a light as though I had a right there, but now I thought otherwise. It would place ourselves in a position to be distinctly seen, and leave the stranger in darkness. So I crept in unlighted and unheralded, and Willard crept in behind me. I held the means for a light in one hand, and in the other nothing.

We found it wider as we went, and the surface over which we crawled was uneven and jagged in places. After a little distance we stood upon our feet, and could reach nothing over our heads. We were evidently in something of a room, and it was dark as Egypt.

"Strike a light," said Willard, in a whisper.

"A little further, first," said I.

We went forward a few feet, and came against a wall of rock. Passing along by the side of it, we turned a rough corner to the left.

"Listen!" said Willard.

There did seem to be muffled sounds, as of a person walking, but very indistinct.

"Shall I strike a light?"

"No; wait."

We waited ten minutes, I judge. We continued to hear the same sounds, though so indistinctly, that we were uncertain whether the sounds were really sounds, or mere fancies in the darkness.

"Let us return," said Willard.

"Let us go on," said I.

I started forward, and he followed me as before, keeping his hand on my shoulder. We went forty feet, I should judge, and came to a wall again. Here there could be no mistake as to the sounds. Whether made by men or devils, we could not tell—whether walking or moving articles we could not tell, but that there were sounds, was no longer a debatable question.

"Shall I strike a light?" I asked again.

"No, what are you thinking about? Let us return—I tell you we are in danger."

He had little physical courage, and for that matter, I had little myself. Still, I saw no reason for flight, and I was fond of adventure. He was younger than I, and had slept while I smoked in the moonlight. Circumstances gave me the advantage.

"Danger or no danger, I am determined to know what these noises mean. Choose for yourself, whether to return and leave me, or go on with me."

He did not answer, and I moved along to the left. We found several feet, at times, of smooth walking, and then places so jagged that we half stumbled, and got more or less bruised. He still carried the guns, and I the unlighted torch and matches.

We stopped again, and the sounds were yet more distinct. Not continuous, though, but like the sudden and rapid walking of a person for a moment, and then a cessation. There were also harder sounds, like dishes being placed upon a table. Mind, I say like.

We started again, without a word having been spoken. I tripped as I started, and fell down—down, and Willard with me. We fell down a precipice, and struck upon a rock. Both were bruised, yet neither of us severely injured. It filled me with horror, though, absolute horror, for now if no one came to assist us, we must inevitably perish. It was the first impulse to call for help; an impulse which would have been instantly obeyed, but for a wild, piercing scream which broke upon our ears. We were still lying upon the rock, as we had fallen, I underneath, and Willard's arm resting over my body. The scream startled us—and it had hardly died away, when we heard loud sobs and lamentations. Then there were pleadings, the most pitiful and heart-rending. It was the voice of a female, and astonishment and uncertainty kept us silent.

Nearer came the sounds, and in the moments when no voice was heard, we could hear the sound of feet. We ought to have cried out—it is almost a wonder that we kept silent—but the mystery that enshrouded us claimed our tongues. Nearer, and over our heads, till it became evident that people were standing near the spot from whence we had fallen. What did it mean?

Suddenly a light of dazzling brightness revealed a female standing upon the verge of the precipice. Her hair hung loosely around her shoulders—her hands were clasped upon her breast, and she seemed a picture of more than earthly loveliness; a face, white as marble, standing against a background of long, flowing black hair. Her eyes were as black as night—and the rich apparel with which she was clothed, gave evidence that she had not known want. She stood on the verge for half a minute, and the light remained while she stood. We could see the rocks on every side, and see her distinctly, and the form of a man standing behind her, while we ourselves were invisible in the darkness.

During that half minute, I had not the remotest idea of the issue, as it shortly came. I did indeed have a vague, bewildering notion, that some villain was being transacted in the cave, but what, or that that moment held the issues of life and death, never occurred to my mind. I had read of desperate characters, but that any man could become so entirely a demon as to hurl a lovely woman over that precipice, in the awful shadow of that cave, I could not have believed it, had I not seen it for myself. For I saw now, that Willard and myself were resting on a shelf of the rock, while a bottomless gulf yawned below, and that from the position which the female occupied, there was inevitable death in the plunge. She stood some feet to the right of the place whence we had fallen, and could by no possibility be saved by the shelf which had so kindly shielded us. And even while this thought flashed through my mind, she was toppled over by the man behind her, and the light went out.

"Father—mother—babe—O God! have mercy!"

She had clutched with dying energy a rough place in the rock, and spoke these words, ere yet she went down into the abyss.

"Hold, hold!" said I in a whisper, "hold on a minute, and I will save you."

She answered not a word. Willard held me by one hand, and stepping along to the verge of the shelf, and placing one foot against a point beyond, I reached her the other.

"Pull—quick and hard!" I whispered to Willard. With considerable violence she swung against the edge of the shelf, and I stood securely upon its surface. After that there was little difficulty in lifting her up.

"Heaven be thanked!" she said, in a hoarse whisper, with great emphasis on the word heaven. "But who are you? And why have you saved me? Am I yet to die? O, where am I?"

I told her briefly and rapidly who we were, and how we chanced to be in that strange position, at that awful moment.

"It was wrong that we saved you, perhaps, since likely now we must all perish with hunger."

"No. You have saved me indeed. O, what a destiny! You have saved me, and I will save you. But listen!" she spoke rapidly, in a low whisper. "I am ruined, ruined, ruined! Good God! am I ruined? No, no, I am saved! God has done this thing. Listen—I am married! My child is even now asleep in the cave. He will leave it to perish, as he dare not leave me—he dare not! He knew I would rend the rocks but I would find him again. He married me privately, and no one knew that we were married. And before my babe was born, he brought me here—my child is a child of the cavern—we have been prisoners here for months. He has promised

everything, and violated every oath. O, poor, poor father and mother! Dead, dead! Do you think your child is dead, father? No, God has been with her! O, poor, poor father and mother! Lone and broken-hearted. I am broken-hearted. Who robbed us of our happiness? Who killed you, father? Who killed me?"

She paused for a moment, and then said, in a slow, measured tone of intense passion, "He also shall die!"

There were some minutes of silence; I, indeed, spoke to her, but she made no reply. Some great thought had evidently taken possession of her soul. In her own time she spoke again.

"Yes, I have it in my hand." She had taken one of the guns. "Now then, follow me, and I will lead you to a place of safety. There are some steps beyond here, which I have ascended a hundred times. But, silence! Strike no light; make no noise; follow me, or perish here, which?"

"We will follow."

She led us up some rough steps in the rock, to the level above, and along this level a considerable distance. I had no thought of there being any significance in her words, "he also shall die,"—at least, no immediate significance, because I supposed he had fled from the cave. And for anything remote, I cared nothing. A thousand deaths were his due, and I cared not how many of them she inflicted.

She turned abruptly to the right, and the rays of light from an inner room fell upon her face. In an instant—while yet Willard and myself were in darkness—before it was possible to interfere with her movements, she seized the rifle, and fired. She then rushed in, seized her child, and said, as she passed us:

"The avenger has done her work. It is terrible, terrible! O God! that it must be, yet it must, must, must!"

She took my hand; "you are God's angels, sent to save the innocent and punish the guilty. O! merciful Heaven—hold me—I am dying!"

She swooned away, and we softly bore her to a couch in the lighted room. Her lips were ashen white, her eyes closed, seemingly sleeping the sleep of death. Willard went for assistance, and after hours the physician came—friends came—father, mother and sister came. Days went by—the body of her husband (O, what a desecration of the world!) was borne to its grave—and still, in her delirium she said, "The avenger has done her work!"

Willard returned to his charge, and I waited in St. Paul, for I hoped that Heaven in mercy would spare her life. Persecuted, wronged, outraged as she had been, I could not find it in my heart to curse the hand which had bravely defended itself.

And God spared her. When the news was told me, I hastened to bid her farewell, and the next day took the morning boat down the river. Thus ended "My Adventure in a Cave."

### "JENNY WADE."

This is the name of a little poem which we have perused with much pleasure, from the pen of the wife of one of our distinguished army officers.

The story proves that as well as its hero, John Burns, Gettysburg had also its heroine, Jenny Wade, a young girl, who, during the fight, was baking bread for the soldiers of the Union army. Her cottage stood where the shots were flying thickly, and often she was urged to leave her task and seek a place of safety. But no entreaties could move her, and when the fight was over, she was found dead in her house, shot through the heart by a minnie ball. The story is full of pathos, with a rich commingling of true, loyal, Union sentiment.

### "WORDS OF CHEER."

Old subscribers sending in their names anow, often drop a word of encouragement.

"My name for the 'Home,' if you please," says a lady in the West. "We have had it five years, and now cannot live without it. There never was a periodical so rightly named. It is indeed a *home* magazine. There is something in it for every one in the family circle, from papa down to three-year-old, and even the baby crows and laughs when he sees it coming and rubs it with his chubby fist, and bites the corners, that is when he gets hold of it, which is very seldom, since every copy, though read through many times, is yet carefully preserved to be bound in a volume at the end of the year."

Another writes:—

"Our best wishes for your success. Your periodical is conducted with a purity and grace which should give it place among the *first*."

We feel confident that the subscription list for 1866 will far exceed that of any previous year.

We intend to make a slight change in the arrangement of our fashion plates, introducing embroideries, designs for marking, and novelties in "*lingerie*" under the head of the toilet and work-table department. We hope to introduce here every month the latest patterns, and also the most tasteful, for the use of the lady readers of the *Home Magazine*. A want of space prevented the full accomplishment of this design in the present number.

### A PUBLISHER AS AN AUTHOR.

We have a novelty in the book-line called "Our Artist in Cuba," which must achieve great popularity in this country. The *New York Citizen* contains the following account of its origin:—

"Within this tasteful binding are pictures only—pictures etched with ink in a note-book, yet so full of rollicking fun, and so salient with the characteristics of easy-going tropical life, that a very Dennis would grow good-natured over the first leaf. Sojourning, for health's sake, in the island of Cuba during the winter of 1864-5, Mr. Carleton gave full vent to his happy faculty for sketching characteristic scenes, representative characters, and the outlines of odd adventures; and when, on his return home, "the note-book" (as usual) was called for by his author friends in general, the little sketches were unanimously declared to give a better idea of life in Cuba than any amount of labored writing could, and a strong pressure in favor of their publication was successfully brought to bear."

We commend the book to all dyspeptics and lean people. While it appeals most feelingly to the sensibilities of those of our unfortunate countrymen who

have attempted to sojourn in Cuba and have experienced the many miseries and mishaps which are there to be enjoyed by a stranger; it is replete with humor which the "uninitiated" may enjoy with almost equal relish.

### ARTEMUS WARD.

This comical lecturer, after a "farewell" season in New York and Philadelphia, has announced his intention of visiting foreign lands. The fame of his unparalleled "show of moral wax figures" has already preceded him, and we doubt not he will meet with a very cordial welcome upon the "other side." He leaves a testimonial of his regard to comfort us in his absence and to "keep our spirits up," in the form of a second volume of his "goaks." They are a continuation of the old familiar letters of travel written in his own inimitable style. When he returns from abroad we may look for a rich treat in the way of "memories of foreign lands." England and France and our other neighbors and cousins may find themselves served up to the American public, in a manner at once entertaining and novel. We may rest assured his sense of the ludicrous will not allow any little "peculiarities" to go unnoticed.

## LA BELLE ARTISTE.

BY MRS. L. S. GOODWIN.

## I.

## A DREAD ADVENTURE.

"HER pictures are the Marsellaise in colors. This before us affects the eye precisely as our national hymn affects the ear, and both possess the heart."

"You know the artiste then? She must be inspired."

"I know little more concerning her than ran wild throughout all Paris within a twelve-month—namely, that she is Clotilde, daughter of his high reverence, the Cardinal de Villieu. She is scarce fifteen—a mere child. Yet, except this one exquisite landscape, all her paintings were produced over a year since. It has been intimated that her gift was short-lived, and disappeared as it came; the gem before us, however, puts that slander to flight. Others assert she only finds her inspiration in one particular chamber of her father's ancient chateau overhanging the Seine, close by the prison; and that the cardinal who is very proud and very fond of her, fearing for her health, removed her to a more salubrious locality, when of necessity her genius was left behind."

"This is no meteoric genius. It cannot die, though well might it stand awhile mute in awe of itself. Or it may feel discouragement in the limitation of its own powers; for this production, winning the praises of thousands, one feels did by no means satisfy the artiste herself. Therein is the seal of real genius. It is as if a caged bird, at last broken free, should cleave the upper air, yet not at once be able to comprehend its glorious freedom."

"Hush!—what is the sensation with the throng? Ah, it is her name whispered from lip to lip. '*Clotilde, she is coming!*' They part to give her space. I shall be delighted to look on her—it is said she is beautiful as an angel."

Beautiful angel indeed, as we conceive of angelic beauty,

"— yet not too good  
For human nature's daily food,"

was the rare young creature, attended by a single footman, who passed slowly between the living walls, occasionally smiling and bowing as she recognized a friend in the crowd, but otherwise all unconscious of the admira-

tion she excited throughout the grand exhibition hall.

Not half enough had the throng feasted their eyes, when she was gone. Then all pressed to have one more look at the picture. It had been sold within the first hour of being brought hither, they said—for the young artistesold all her pictures and gave the money to the poor, making the distribution with her own hands; which proved that the beauty of her face did not belie the goodness of her heart.

Clotilde returned to her carriage, and was driven to a humble and somewhat remote portion of the city. There alighting at the head of one of the narrowest and dingiest streets, she bade the coachman await her return; entered its dark precincts unattended, and passed on with rapid feet that were evidently accustomed to their way.

Half an hour had elapsed when a female shriek rang through the purlieus of the neighborhood. Instantly the very paving stones, imbedded in mire, seemed to assume human shape, so thickly thronged the wretched inhabitants; and men, women and children echoed inquiries which for a time none could answer, of who and what and where.

At length one reported that a young lady had been carried off by a couple of ruffians, who had snatched her up and disappeared with her among the many devious lanes of the place, and instantly the excited crowd took up the refrain. The unfortunate victim seemed known and yet unknown. Voices cried out that it was the young lady who sometimes came to 25—more than this, no one could say.

While the coachman with difficulty restrained his horses, rearing amid the surging throng of human beings, not knowing whether indeed he had best delay where he was or drive home with all speed and give information of what had befallen, an old woman pressed her way up to the carriage with wringing of hands but no other demonstration of woe. Her whole appearance marked her as being above the *canaille* by whom she was surrounded. Her gown, though of common material, was clean and neat; the pure gray hair was laid smoothly beneath the border of her snowy cap; in evidently been fair.

Hardly had she appeared when a young man, habited in a *robe de chambre*, and wearing neither hat nor shoes, bearing in his arms a scarce animate female form, made his way likewise to the carriage, drew open the door

and deposited his fair burthen on its cushions. One moment he bent over her reclining there, pressed a kiss on the white forehead, and reluctantly left her, with difficulty shutting her in from the eager gaze of the multitude who were loudly applauding the rescue. The heart may beat right, though rags cover it.

Right and left swayed the crowd at the behest of the pale handsome young stranger, who shouted to the coachman to "drive on"—that "all was well;" and having watched the carriage till it turned a corner from sight, with the tenderly-uttered epithet—"mother," drew the arm of the gray-haired woman within his own and disappeared.

## II.

### THE REAL ARTIST.

GREAT was the consternation of the cardinal on learning what peril his daughter had encountered; but his chief thought was of bringing to punishment her abductors, rather than of rewarding her preserver. But days passed and the placards at the corners of the streets began to grow weather-stained, while to the cardinal's disappointment no one appeared to claim the liberal reward they offered for the apprehension of the criminals.

Meanwhile Clotilde was gently forbidden to go out any more alone on her errands of mercy, and trusty servants appointed to see that for the present she did not leave the house. To soften his mandate as much as possible, her father himself provided her with a new supply of artists' materials in her favorite chamber, where he told her she should be free to lock herself in for many hours together, as she used to do when engaged on the pictures which had won for her the public admiration.

"I care nothing for these," returned the daughter, half grieved half petulant, "I cannot paint—I have never painted anything worthy of notice, and never shall. Boutine was right when he told you I had no capacity. Neither do I like the chateau at all."

"Sweetly perverse!" said the cardinal to himself, "my dear child is more a woman every day."

The same afternoon as Clotilde sat in somewhat gloomy reverie, a secret influence she knew not what drew her to a small window overlooking the prison yard, whence she beheld a prisoner, heavily ironed, let out of a cart at the gate and dragged like a dead dog

in the direction of the lowest and most loathsome of the prison dungeons. She uttered a groan, and clasped her hands tightly over her heart, that stood still, then bounded like a wounded deer.

Vainly she rallied and strove to believe the person some guilty wretch, whose face and name were all unknown to her. There had been no sufficient opportunity of recognizing him; yet a sweet sad greeting, mingling love and despair, had seemed to come up to her through the murky atmosphere.

"Vivian! Vivian!" she murmured, tears sparkling in her eyes like crystals while she paced her room to and fro.

Pausing suddenly she seemed to reflect or to listen intently. Then turning she secured her door, closed the window shutters with what haste she could, and lighted a lamp, although it wanted hours of sunset.

At the opposite side of the chamber she lifted the arras and touched a point in the wall, when a secret door flew open, disclosing beneath the rays of the lamp she held, a flight of winding stairs descending till they were lost in impenetrable darkness. She bent low, again listening; but no sound ascended out of the abyss. But the slight whisper of her lips called as it were a spirit echo out of the depths.

"I will go down." (*Echo—low down!*) "What should I fear?" (*Fear!*) "Vivian came by this way," (*Hist! Away!*) "My artist chained!" (*My heart is flame!*) "In a cell he shall be mine host," (*demon ghost!*) "Clotilde, will come to thee through the universe," (*Clotilde—come be—one of us!*)

She started back. At that moment there came a knock to the door of her chamber. The secret door shut of itself noiselessly, the curtain was let fall before it; she flew to reopen the shutters, extinguished her lamp and obeyed the summons. It proved to be a messenger from her father, who desired her to be informed that one of the two ruffians had been taken and was now in prison. "The cardinal would come to his daughter," the messenger added, "so soon as an important matter should be despatched."

Clotilde again alone, shook her head.

"I must still believe it is Vivian," she sighed. "And O! I will tell my father everything. My artist has a noble soul, and the genius my father worships—genius better than riches. He can deny me nothing."

Her thoughts went back to the day fifteen months before, whose strange events had been

to her the beginning of the blissful misery of love. She was weeping childishly on the floor before her easel, where she had flung herself in vexation and thorough dislike of her task. The master had just left her, having done nothing but chide; and indeed she made no progress whatsoever.

Clotilde had believed herself alone, but on looking up beheld sitting opposite a youth with deep clear eyes under a broad white forehead, and a smile which was to her what sunshine would have been to him in his lone dark cell. "Are you Adonis?" she inquired. "No, mademoiselle, except I am already dead, and you the flower sprung from my decay. But I can paint—will you let me paint for you?"

Here then was the secret of her fame. A prisoner accused of treason, laboring to trace on his dungeon wall what he deemed might be hieroglyphics written there, had accidentally touched a spring which opened a door admitting him into a passage, rayless like his dungeon. At the further end of the passage a long flight of stairs, at the head of the flight another secret door. He viewed the chamber through the arras, then ventured into the presence of the weeping child.

She loved the artist—was beloved by him, and both were happy. He scarcely thought any longer of what might be his doom, till one day he was set at liberty. From that time he lived with his aged mother in obscure lodgings; for besides being poor, he knew too well the fickleness of what was called justice to feel good assurance of his freedom being continued to him.

Here he seemed to prosper less than in confinement; for he fell ill—too ill to pursue his favorite employment—and was only pronounced convalescent, when on the occasion of Clotilde's last visit, he rushed forth in time to save his beloved from the grasp of violence.

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### III.

#### "DUNGEON AND BLOCK."

It was indeed Vivian St. Orme whom Clotilde had seen returned to his cold damp dungeon. From the fetters that bound his limbs, and the cruelty heaped upon him, the prisoner knew that this time there was little to hope for, and that he might prepare speedily to meet death. His mother and Clotilde were commended to God as his own soul.

His apprehensions were too true. An hour

only elapsed when the huge key of his dungeon again turned in its lock, the ponderous door grated harshly on its hinges, and three men entered. The first who was carelessly swinging a lantern in his hand, halted to guard the door. The second passed by, and the third, the former bearing the engine of death—an axe and a block; the latter was the Cardinal Villieu, come to see his work well executed.

"You have but five minutes to live," he said to St. Orme.

"Grant me ten, sire, and strike off my shackles, that I may offer my last supplications to Heaven as a man and not as a felon."

"Which of our abundant clemency we grant," returned the cardinal. "*Attendez vos prières.*"

"Be pleased, also, most excellent cardinal, to order me leave to withdraw for the brief space allotted me, to the little inner cell where I have a crucifix of clay plastered on the wall. Let the bolts be drawn, for I would be alone before the Almighty Sovereign; when the moment comes I shall be found ready."

This request being likewise obtained, Vivian touched the secret spring and darted along the well-remembered passage, pausing not till within his lady's chamber, he knelt at her feet. Clotilde embracing him burst into tears.

"Bless thee!" he cried pressing with his lips her wet eyelids, "it is joy enough for me that I find myself once more in your presence."

"How happy you look, my artist, my hero, my own Vivian. I am glad at least that you are not manacled."

"Ay loveliest, I shall wear fetters no more. Your father himself has promised as much."

"My father? Then all will be well."

"All will be well, and shortly. But now I must return."

"So soon!"

"But we shall meet again, Clotilde—we shall meet again. Adieu, my love—adieu."

He waved her back, but she followed to the secret door and held it open. Her flying lover even thought he heard her descend a stair or so, but of course she would come no further. Just as the rusty bolt was being thrust back by the waiting executioner, Vivian entered the inner cell.

"Come," growled the other, impatiently—"it is too cold here for his high reverence. Be speedy."

"Excuse me, my lord," bowing low, and

St. Orme promptly advancing knelt before the block.

For what crime he was to suffer—whether on the renewal of the former baseless allegation, or some other equally so, he knew not, nor did it matter. Not improbably however his love for the fair Clotilde had been discovered; and the active part her father took in the case would seem to confirm this opinion.

"*Miserere Domine,*" and the doomed man bent his head to the block.

At that instant Clotilde with a piercing shriek fell upon his neck.

"O my father, it was he who saved me!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Vivian St. Orme was speedily released. He had been mistakenly arrested as one of the two ruffians, and thus, without even the semblance of a trial, was to have been executed.

Cardinal Villieu rewarded him with the hand of his lovely daughter, gaining to himself an artist son, thus satisfying a lifelong ambition, in default of which he had striven to make an artiste of Clotilde.

In one of the finest chateaus in the environs of Paris, the pair, with the gray-haired mother of the bridegroom, lived long and happily; Vivian pursuing his art, Clotilde glorying in his fame. In time the walls of the elegant home which had been part of the bride's dower, came to be hung with portraits of children and children's children.

old-fashioned sofa, a rosewood skatell, a great many oil paintings hung in an incongruous way, a splendid set of shelves stowed with books, a violin case on a stand among some flasks and glasses, and a parrot on a perch in the corner. Upon the hearth rug was the most luxurious of great chairs in which Lamond was placed while his host procured cigars.

"Real Havanas, David—I know where they came from; and here's a glass for you—port or sherry?"

Lamond touched the Amontillado to his lips and turned back to the fire.

"How cozy your room is, Uncle Philip."

"You like it, then? ha, ha! I thought you would. I've wanted you to see it ever since I came home; I remember your boyish trick of making a museum of your chamber. Now here I've all my pets about me just as I like them, and no one comes in but the privileged few. There's some real Gobelin tapestry over there at the windows. I set a store by it. I put Ceto over in the corner because he spattered it when I fed him—a real purple lory, David; hear him whistle. He'll talk like a landlady drunk on tea. Now have a look at my violin—a real cremona. Listen! isn't that a jewel?" drawing the bow skillfully across the strings. "I had fine times last winter when the place was buried in snow, and I was shut up alone here."

"Where were the girls?"

"In New York. Mary had a friend there—a Miss Margaret Clare. Grace was with them. Nice girls—pretty girls, all of them. More sherry, David?"

"No, thank you," yielding to the warmth of the fire, and looking dreamily at it. "Where did you get those pictures, Uncle Philip?"

Mr. Larrington jumped up enthusiastically.

"They're all originals, David. Any one would know that garden scene for a real Watteau. See the *clair-obscur*—the light on the lawn, and the shadow of the trees on the parterre! There's no doubt at all that it's a Watteau. The female head is a copy of Allston—the only copy that ever was made, and the original destroyed by Allston himself for some imagined fault. That's a Claude, this a Raphael. That's what Greuze intended for a beauty—not half so much a one as my May. You must see May directly, David; I'll call her as soon as she comes in from the garden. There's a whole flock of girls to dinner. Are you afraid of them?"

"No," smiling.

"You're a brave fellow. Come here and see my aloe, David; I calculate it will blossom when I'm in my sixtieth year. What's that you've got hold of?—my Etruscan jar; but I believe I was cheated in that. I bought it of an old antiquary in Paris. I don't think he would have parted with it if it had been genuine. David, you've grown pale in the last five years. You used to be a vigorous sapling of the old stock."

"The Larrington blood has run low over Coke and Blackstone."

"Well, we won't have you studying out here. Just vegetate, and I'll tell you stories. Now stretch out there on that old sofa—your mother used to sit on it when she was a girl—and I'll tell you an adventure I had at Havre last summer."

Lamond obeyed, and smoked luxuriously while his uncle commenced what he afterwards discovered to be a favorite recital. He was a good listener, yet that did not prevent his dark, comprehensive eyes taking in a thousand alien ideas as they wandered about the room. The full spring sunshine touched his dark hair, striking a strange brightness from the fine clusters, and reddening the exquisitely cut lips under the profuse silken beard. At twenty-six David Lamond was very much a man and very much a child.

As he lay there he thought that the eyes of the little French beauty by Greuze were fixed upon him. So May was prettier than that, was she? He remembered his cousin as a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked, merry thing of fifteen, not particularly beautiful, but affectionate and light-hearted. She was twenty now. His cousin Grace he had parted with when she was a mere child—for in his devotion to professional duties he had been lost to his kindred for a long time. He had come back to them for a rest now. His uncle had lately returned from Europe; May and Grace were his wards. Lamond was settled in Baltimore.

He fell asleep before dinner, haunted by a half consciousness of the curious and comfortable room where in he lay, so that he dreamed of Gobelin tapestry, Amontillado sherry, afoes, and meerschaums, until he was called to dress for dinner.

A flock of girls, surely! Blue eyes, gray eyes, and black eyes, rosy cheeks and carnation lips, flaxen curls, golden braids, and raven bands—black and scarlet, blue, and pink, and purple drapery. David Lamond, though not afraid of girls, was a little bewildered. It was a dinner party of May's old school friends.

May was pretty. A frank, sweet-faced girl, with chestnut curls and blue eyes. David was at ease with her directly.

"And where is your pet friend, May?"

"There by Uncle Philip. I'll present you directly." Among the laughter, and chat, and merry jests, Lamond glanced at a face with but one beauty—its wealth of satin braids.

"She is not at all like you, May."

"No, she is better."

"She is much older."

"Ten years. She is all the world to me, David. I have no mother or older sister, and she is both."

"She looks good."

"She is the noblest woman I ever knew."

David Lamond was a little surprised to hear his cousin speak like this. He glanced keenly at the falling curls and infantile cheek. Yes, May was prettier

than the little French beauty by Greuze, and she evidently knew more than most French beauties, though it seemed strange, with her boarding-school education.

There were several gentlemen present—neighbors and friends of the family; among them was a Mr. Basil Rosenberg.

"He's a famous musician," said May, "and admires Margaret."

It was quite evident. The young man's fair hair almost touched the lady's ebony braids as he leaned towards her, and he seemed to have no thoughts for any one else present. Lamond observed this apparent fascination until he grew curious.

"Don't fail to present me to your friend at the first opportunity," he whispered to May, as they came from the table.

With all the abandon of a boy, he was playing "Simon says thumbs up" with two pretty girls in the alcove of a window half an hour later, when May pushed aside the curtains.

"David, when you are at leisure, come into the music-room," she said.

In the music-room he found some one playing and singing Allen Percy in a way that astonished him. It was Miss Clare. When she arose from the piano and came out of the admiring crowd to the door where May stood, his cousin presented him. In five minutes he couldn't have told whether Margaret Clare had any fine points or not. He only knew that he was in love with her.

It was not that she had the air of a queen among those gay girls, it was not that she sang so divinely, or because of any intellectual brilliancy. David Lamond did not know why he loved Margaret Clare except that she was herself. She had sweet, gracious ways, a gentle self-possession, a musical voice; all these things enchanted him, yet he believed he would have loved her without them. In the days when he rode the country by her side, in the evenings when she sewed with May and he read to them both, in the mornings when he heard her sweet songs in the garden, he grew to need her as his breath. In that strange old room of his uncle's they sat late into the summer nights, listening to tales of Madrid and Seville, or that city of gardens, Versailles. They heard the history of the thousand curiosities about the room, the funny toys from Bamberg, the bust obtained at a fabulous price at Munich, the old original manuscripts bought at a Leipzig fair, the scarf dropped by a German prince at Frankfurt, the horn of an ibex, a shell from Tarento, some etchings of Florence, an elaborately carved crucifix, lost by a French nun, a cushion from a harem, the brilliant wing of a bird from the swamps of Bucharest, and innumerable rare porcelains, pictures, and *bijouterie*. All these things were the prelude to rare, strange stories when twilight wrapped the old room, and the scent of roses and blossomed locust trees blew in at the open windows. Grace, who was yet a child, would be on the floor with her head on her uncle's knee, May swung idly in the Indian hammock hung for her and half filled with flowers, and Lamond at Margaret's feet as she sat in the faint light at the window, watched her face in the dusk, and bathed in an utter content.

But life at Ashcroft was not all a dream. There were excursions up the mountains, horseback rides over the commons, and a time of camping out on the shores of Green Lake. But it was all a happier life than David Lamond had ever dreamed of.

Yet the summer was gone at last. Lamond's blue eyes grew dark with thought when he looked from his chamber window one morning and saw the ash trees of the avenue growing russet and gold, while the woodbine about his window was like a vine afire. It was time that he returned to the city.

He went out to walk in the early morning. The golden rod and asters made the fields gaudy. He tramped the bright weeds under his feet as he walked, knowing nothing but his own thoughts. He knew now what the summer had brought him—love.

He tried to consider calmly, but invariably came back to the same thought—"If she refuses me, I will kill myself!"

He returned to the house, at last.

Margaret was teaching Grace in the music-room. May sat at the piano, but turned quickly at his entrance.

"Why, what is the matter, David? You are as pale as death!"

He recollected himself, and tried to be composed. "Nothing is the matter with me; perhaps I'm tired. I'll sit down here; don't mind me. Go on with your practicing."

He flung himself upon the low, cushioned window-seat. Margaret went on quietly talking with Grace, but May turned her music confusedly, and finally left the room. It was strange how insensate Margaret was to his unconsciously burning gaze. Her face was like marble, and she hardly glanced up from the book she held. Nor could be detected a tremor in her gentle voice. She rose up at last.

"Now, Grace, we will go up stairs."

Lamond sprang to his feet.

"Margaret, one moment alone."

At the same instant May looked in at the door.

"Margaret, Basil Rosenberg to see you," she said.

Lamond's face darkened. Margaret looked up at him, quickly.

"I have a visitor; you'll excuse me now, David," and she glided from the room.

She went to ride with Rosenberg. It was evening before he saw her again. Then he caught sight of her gray dress as she walked slowly back and forth under the trees in the avenue. May was with her, but she left her after a little while, and Margaret

[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

## MARGARET'S LOVE.

BY FREDERIC HOWE MARION.

"A SUMMER at Ashcroft. I wonder what it will bring me," said David Lamond as he passed up the superb avenue of a fine old summer seat known in the town of Lennox as Ashcroft. The ash trees rustled above his head in the high April wind, and when he had shut the iron gate behind him, the array of tulips in the garden flaunted gaily in the sunshine.

He went up the walk, crossed the piazza, and rang the door bell. Instantly the door was opened, and a fine, hospitable face appeared behind the negro.

"Home, are you, David? Welcome!" And the hand of the young man was heartily grasped by the master of Ashcroft, Mr. Philip Larrington, who drew his nephew into a spacious, comfortable room, half library half nondescript apartment, and wholly a bachelor's den. A fire was blazing on the hearth and warmed the chilly spring atmosphere. It gave cheeriness to an aspect of things which might have seemed in confusion and discomfort if they had not in its glow looked cosy and comfortable. The floor was covered by matting, unmatched by curtains of rich tapestry. Against one window stood a flower-stand with a few pots upon it. Three tables held a collection of unrecognizable articles. There was a great antiquated lounge and several stuffed arm-chairs, an

went into the woods alone, the golden birch woods which surrounded Ashcroft. Springing up, he left the house, and sought her there.

She stood under the trees, her eyes, inexpressibly sad, fixed upon the dying embers of the west; apparently she was lost in thought. His step did not arouse her until he was close at her side.

"Margaret."

She turned, looked into his face, and grew ashy pale.

"Margaret, I love you."

"Hush, David."

"Will you not listen to me?"

"No, I cannot."

"One question. Will you be my wife?"

"No."

"Good-by, then, forever. Don't come in my way, Margaret, until I can leave this place. Good-by—good-by! God bless you."

He wrung her hands convulsively, and was gone. When the next train left the town that night, he was on his way to Baltimore.

A year passed. One winter's day he sat moodily in his law-office when the city postman brought his mail. Among the letters was one from his uncle, Philip Larrington. It ran as follows:

"Ashcroft, Nov. 25th.

"DEAR NEPHEW:—Since little Gracie died, the old place is painfully gloomy, and I think May's health suffers from it. She certainly pines from some reason, and I propose to have a little party at Christmas—just a family affair, with some holly wreaths, and Margaret's music, if she can be prevailed upon to come. Since her severe illness, a year ago, she has hardly left her room in New York. I used to believe you were in love with her, David, but I presume you thought, with me, that there was too much inequality of ages. Margaret is a fine girl, though, a very fine girl.

"Be sure and come. I'm lonesome.

"Your uncle,

"PHILIP."

For a year Lamond had fought manfully and stealthily against his passion, and he thought he had conquered it. "I think I can see her now," he said. "She will be indifferent, and I can be cold, though my heart may ache a little. It will be better to see her."

So he went to Ashcroft. Little Gracie's sunny face was gone, and Mary was very pale in her black dress, but there was happy cheer in the house. When he entered the parlor, Margaret, the Margaret of old, arose from the music stool to greet him, her voice calm, her manner constrained, but dangerously cordial. The clasp of her slight hand ran to his heart like electricity. He bowed low, and turned away.

An hour soon passed. He had meant to be merry, but he was miserable. He sat down by his uncle, when the rest were playing Copenhagen.

"I'm glad you're here, David," said he. "We got Margaret, too, though she is not looking strong at all. Rosenberg finally persuaded her, I believe; they say she's engaged to him."

Lamond was unconscious of the answer he made. Never, in all his year's discipline, had he felt so utterly hopeless, aimless, and wretched.

During the holiday week, he devoted himself to May. She was frail and pretty, and seemed to cling to him. Grateful for her affection, he grew to feel very tenderly towards her. When on New Year's night he parted with her, he said:

"May, if I come back in six months, will you be my wife, and go to Baltimore with me?" and clinging to him with an abandon which surprised him, she promised.

It was summer again when they were married. The wedding-day was cool, and fresh, and clear. The birds sang, the laughter of gay girls echoed their songs, and Margaret was bridesmaid. When the twilight shadows fell, all was over, and the house seemed solitary and desolate to the old man, who had lost in so short a time both his wards, each loved tenderly, as a daughter.

One more short year. Then came the greatest change of all. May Lamond was dying. She had been brought back to the old house at Lennox. Ashcroft was never so sad as when the cry of a new-born baby broke the summer stillness, heralding the death of its young mother. No love or care could lift up the falling strength. The agony had been too great—her feet were in the downward path—they could not call her back. She did not know the faces around her, until a bitter tear fell upon her hair. She looked up slowly into her husband's eyes.

"Good-by, dear. When the grass has grown green above me, open the drawer of my writing-desk; there is something there for you. Carry my baby to Margaret."

That was all she ever said on earth. At midnight she died. The little child lived. David Lamond looked at its sleeping face in doubt. He had a mother who would care for it, but he remembered his wife's wish, and finally wrote to Margaret. She answered, "Bring me the child."

He went and left it in her care, in a gray old homestead in New York. Then he went to Europe.

He dwelt in England for a few months, but harassed by thought, he went wandering through France and Italy, until a longing desire to see his child came over him, and he turned his steps homeward.

Philip Larrington was dead. His new-made grave was beside one made the previous summer—a slender grave, green and sweet with pansies and daisies. He touched the green sward caressingly with his hand.

"Her grave is green. What did she leave for me in her writing-desk? Some memento; perhaps her

wedding-ring. It was not on her hand when she died. O May, my sweet, lost wife! my heart is sore that I could not love you as you should have been loved."

That night he sought out the little ebony writing-desk which May had used. A secret spring opened the drawer. It contained only a letter. He opened it, and a ring of plain gold dropped out. With a beating heart he read the words inscribed:

"David, my husband,—these words you will read when the hand that has penned them is cold in death. My heart tells me that I shall not live through the trial awaiting me—you will be widowed; my baby, if it lives, will be motherless. I do not grieve—it will be better so. Dear, you have been kind and tender, my heart holds you in love and reverence, but it will be better for me to die. It is the only way to right a wrong that has been done. Three lives were cheated a year ago—yours, and Margaret's, and mine. I did not know it then, or it would never have been. But now all is well. God bless you, David! When I am dead ask Margaret to be your wife. Do not hesitate. It will be the dearest wish of my heart to have you united. Give her the ring which should never have been mine, but teach my baby to know of me and love me, if it lives. Good-by. God keep you always—you and Margaret. MAY."

David Lamond crushed the letter in his hand, and shed over it bitter, scalding tears. She had guessed his secret, then; it had embittered her gentle life. What right, what right had he to take her happiness in charge when he was so totally unfitting? He walked the floor, his brain on fire with thought. He had but one comfort; he thanked God that he had spared no pains to make her happy. He dwelt with sad satisfaction on the many times he had seen her sweet face light up with pleasure which he had brought her. He recounted the possessions that had been hers—the beautiful robes, the jewels, the luxuries of living—horses, servants and the thousand advantages of wealth. All these things he knew had been a pleasure to her, in spite of the canker blight at heart. O, if he could have saved her that!

He thought of her child, at last. It was in Margaret's hands, as had been her wish. To-morrow he would see it.

The next day he started for New York. In the old gray homestead he found Margaret and his child. The little one came to him—tripping unsteadily with its tiny feet, calling him "papa," and looking wonderingly into the face it had been taught to anticipate.

"You gave her no name, and I have called her May," said Margaret, timidly, as she lifted the little one, tenderly.

"That was right," said Lamond.

A week later, he showed Margaret the letter, and asked the question he hardly dared to ask. The gray eyes, so truthful, so steadfast, so sweet in their patience, met his, pathetically:

"David, I have loved you always."

"Then, Margaret, in pity's name, why did you send me from you at Ashcroft?"

He knew her heart of gold only when she said, pleadingly, meeting his reproachful gaze:

"May loved you."



## "OUR BIDDY."

### A CHAPTER ABOUT SHREWS.

BY M. E. B.

No person ever accomplished the proverbial transition "out of the fryingpan into the fire" with greater celerity than did "Our Biddy," when she left the parsonage and found a new mistress in the person of the wife of our village grocer. The whole story of her misfortunes may be anticipated in the simple statement that Mrs. Nancy Skinner was a shrew.

A profound linguist, who belongs to that large class of sufferers known as "the hen-pecked," has discovered that the word *virago* is derived from the Latin, and may be interpreted thus—*vir*, a man; *ago*, I drive; which though perhaps not the most strictly classical rendering, may yet be accepted as a truthful signification of the word as proven by our every day observations of the world about us. Men have been driven to intoxication, to bad society, to the grave, to the scaffold, to everlasting destruction by that venom-charged weapon, a woman's tongue.

As yet the historian and novelist have failed to portray the real flesh and blood husband of a vixen. A Socrates who receiving a shower of dirty water after a torrent of abuse, calmly remarks, that "thunder is usually followed by rain." A Petruccio good humoredly taking as pleasant jokes all his wife's invectives. A Joe Gargery who seems to find ample comfort in a pot of beer, and the simple remark that his better half is "on the rampage,"—all these are ideal characters, very delightful as heroes of novels or plays, but quite too far-removed from human frailties to stand as representative men of the large class to which they belong.

Quite below this exalted standard of patient endurance fall the Johns and Thomases of the present day. Men who are merely ordinary in their attainments, possessed of passions, and subject to weaknesses, gifted also with that unruly member—a tongue—which under much provocation will be excited to self-defence—men who are naturally lovers of concord and fond of peace, and cannot easily, through the thick disguise she wears, bring themselves to regard a vixen as a heaven-sent blessing. Such at least was Peter Skinner, the afflicted husband of Biddy's new mistress.

It has been said that Socrates married Xan-

tippe, knowing her disposition, as a sort of afflictive "means of grace," as far as a heathen might know or appreciate such a religious ordinance; but Peter Skinner did not take his wife "for better or for worse" with any such design. Twenty-five years ago when he committed this "mistake of a lifetime," she was a young, blushing thing, gentle and tender, and overflowing with sweetness. Wrapped in delusion he passed through the six months of wholesale deception commonly called a courtship, and launched out with high hopes upon the sea of matrimony.

Just when the change came Peter never could tell. It was not many months certainly before he discovered that he had taken a termagant into his house and that she was determined to rule the same, evidently with no velvet hand. Time rolled on, and matters grew worse and worse in the home of the grocer, with no outward visible sign thereof, except that Mrs. Nancy's little black eyes grew blacker and sharper, and the slender nose longer and thinner, as the cheeks shrunk away, eaten up by the wicked temper which she nourished in her breast—while Peter's round face took on a stolid expression of endurance and resignation, quite in contrast with the look of jolly good humor which had originally rested there. It was rarely that he ever wore that look now. Sometimes, away from home, seated upon an empty cask in his store, with a few casual loungers about him, he would forget, for the moment, the skeleton in the closet at home, and laugh and talk as merrily as any of them—but woe betide him—if a woman's figure darkened the doorway in such an hour, and that woman proved to be Nancy Skinner. She would not speak unpleasantly then of course, to scold him for his laziness or taunt him with his inefficiency, but she could look unutterable things with those piercing eyes of hers, and when Peter put up the shutters and started for home at night it was with fear and trembling.

Semi-weekly, or thereabouts, after an unusually severe attack, Peter was in the habit of declaring that he would be master in his own house, but somehow he never had been,

and the prospect of such a state of affairs grew daily more and more uncertain. And this was the unhappy result of an unequal marriage. She was endowed by nature with an inordinate ambition, a nervous, excitable, fretful temperament. Peter was easy, good-humored, phlegmatic. He was content to plod through life with the patient steadiness of a dray horse. Nothing less than a high mettled courser could have kept pace with her desires. He was content to make an easy living, droning about like the summer flies among his casks of sugar and molasses. She would have rushed eagerly into the excitement of trade, have marked out wider plans and sought for larger gains. And so, foolish woman, she sought to drive where she could not lead, and scolded her husband for his small returns, and blamed him for lack of force and talent, and endeavored to control the business according to her woman's vague notions of expediency. This was the primal source of trouble in the Skinner family, running through all the petty concerns of life, leaving the tail of the serpent over them all.

Not that all here recorded was generally known to the world outside by any means. Among the village folks with whom they associated, in the church of which they were members "in good and regular standing," they passed for excellent, agreeable people, moderately happy as the world goes, contented and congenial. No one knew of the bickerings and fault-findings, the ungovernable temper of the lady, nor the angry retorts of the gentleman, nor did any one outside the domestic circle hear the animated discussion which took place at the table upon the day when Biddy first made her appearance in the kitchen of her new mistress.

"So you have concluded to have a girl to help you I see?" said Peter, good-naturedly, as he came in from the store rubbing his hands in an evidently happy frame of mind.

Now if there was any one thing which seemed to render the shrew more irate than another, it was to see her victim in an extraordinarily good humor. It was the signal for an attack at once.

"A pretty question for you to ask, Mr. Skinner, when I might have had one all my life but for your slack, good-for-nothing method of doing business."

"Ah, my dear, I am glad to see you have the bottomless pit open as usual to receive me."

"Humph," she continued, sniffing the air

like an old war-horse eager for the fray, "for twenty years now I have been a slave—yes, a perfect slave, Mr. Skinner, to your indolence. While you have been lounging and gossiping in your store, I have been digging for our daily bread at home. But I have determined to do so no longer. Things may go to rack and ruin now, if you like. I have done all that I intend to do. I am completely worn out in mind and body."

"It is a pity you hadn't used your tongue a little more, madam, so that it too might have joined the general decay."

The taunt had its usual effect upon the lady to increase her volubility, and in no measured terms she proceeded to berate the partner of her bosom, whom, twenty years before, she had sworn at the altar to "love, honor, and obey, as long as life should last."

Peter followed with recrimination and sneers, coming at last to the declaration that he would be master in his own house, which he immediately proved was not the case by seizing his hat and rushing away as quickly as possible.

His amiable spouse followed him with maledictions to the door, then threw open the window for a parting salute, and then repaired to the kitchen and commenced in whining tones to detail her grievances to the new servant, who through the half-open door had listened in amazement to the altercation, and looked forward with dim forebodings of the wrath to come upon her own devoted head.

With dish-cloth in hand, Biddy listened for some moments to the woman whose ungovernable temper had long since carried her beyond the bounds of self-respect, then she modestly ventured the inquiry—

"And was ye iver expectin' to be afther goin' to heaven, ma'am?"

"Of course I am," retorted the madam, sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I mane nothing," said Biddy, somewhat alarmed, "I was only thinkin' what ye wud be afther doin' wid him through the mighty long years that's comin' thin at all, at all."

"The impudent huzzy," said the vixen, as she slammed the kitchen door with an uncompromising bang, "to question the probability of my going to heaven. I'm sure I've had trial enough in this life to make me a saint in the next."

Her ill-temper did not long confine itself to attacks upon Mr. Skinner alone. Poor Biddy soon began to receive her share of abuse, all of which she received with much meekness,

determined, if possible, to endure all things rather than give up a place which in very many respects was extremely desirable.

At length the season for soap-making arrived. The energetic housekeeper, after mixing lye, potash and grease in the large iron kettle over the fire, left the kitchen to receive some visitors in the parlor, charging Biddy to watch the mixture that it did not boil over into the fire.

Once alone, it occurred to our heroine that this would be a favorable opportunity to pursue her studies in the blue spelling-book, which had been now for a long time sadly neglected, owing to the complaints of her fault-finding mistress; so bringing out the well-thumbed volume from the dresser-drawer, where it had been concealed under some towels, picking out the letters carefully one by one, she was soon deeply absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge. Grease, lye and potash soon formed a dangerous combination against her, and, following the bent of their slimy natures, began to murmur and simmer in the iron kettle, and soon filled the room with the disagreeable odor of their slanders and complaints. Still Biddy pored over the book, all unheeding the vile atmosphere they were creating about her.

At length, with one combined effort, they lifted themselves to the top of the kettle, and, peering over to see what she was about, fell plump into the fire beneath, foaming and raging as they touched the blazing coals, and disappeared from sight. But still Biddy was following her big, red finger through the intricacies of three syllabled words, totally oblivious of all that was passing about her.

Finally the disagreeable vapor of the burning soap penetrated the hall, stole quietly in at the parlor door, and soon appealed to the ever acute senses of Mrs. Skinner with no pleasant effect.

"T-i-o-n-shun," Biddy was repeating slowly and carefully as the lady appeared at the kitchen door and gazed for a moment with wrathful eyes upon the picture.

Comprehending the scene at once, all the demon in her was immediately aroused.

"Are you a natural fool?" was the question more forcible than elegant which she first addressed to the object of her wrath.

As Biddy seemed stupefied and unable to answer this rather pointed inquiry, she repeated the same, and then, seizing the innocent spelling-book, she boxed the girl's ears with it as though she had been a wilful child of six

summers, and sent it spinning into the corner of the room. Once more, her black eyes flashing with rage, darting upon the frightened girl she screamed again the only words which seemed to be at her command—

"Are you a natural fool?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Biddy, meekly, evidently thinking some reply necessary, and rubbing her smarting ears, and vainly trying to collect her scattered thoughts, which had been quite dissipated by this outward application of knowledge to the brain.

"Bridget O'Crinnigan," said I from the doorway, where I had arrived just in time to witness the scene, "do you go up stairs and get your bonnet and come with me. A woman who can command herself no better than that is not a fit person to control others."

Mrs. Skinner, who seemed somewhat surprised by the unexpected turn of affairs, was silent for a moment, during which time I took occasion to remark—

"I am very glad that I happened to be a visitor in your parlor when this scene occurred. Biddy was careless, I admit, but not intentionally wrong; and, if a proper time had been allowed her for her studies, would never have stolen it from the hours when she should have been at work."

I did not venture any farther remark, for the black eyes were flashing again, and this time at me, so as Biddy had made her appearance with a small bundle under her arm, I bade her follow me, and made good my retreat from the presence of the shrew.

The next day our worthy minister called upon me to know if I thought it was a Christian act to enter a neighbor's house and entice away her servants.

I told him I thought it was decidedly. And that was all Biddy or I ever said about the matter. We did not desire to injure Mrs. Skinner's reputation among those to whom her peculiarities were unknown, and we could not justify ourselves in any other way.

"Very foolishly done, by a very foolish woman," said Mr. Ewing, when I related the transaction with all its details that night. "You are a very Don Quixotte among women."

"And pray what harm is done now, Mr. Sancho Panza," I asked, rather testily, for I was conscious of having been somewhat impolitic in my action.

"Why can't you see, my dear woman, that by your conduct you have rendered Biddy's

chances of securing a new situation in this town about as good as those of a live Hottentot or a Cannibal Islander would be. I am surprised at your folly.

"But, James."

"Well."

"Why not keep her ourselves. You know"—I merely winked by way of finishing the sentence. I did not trust myself to say it for fear of possible listeners.

"Yes, I know," he said, nodding sagely. "Perhaps it would be best, since we can well afford it."

For the fact was, Mr. Ewing had "struck ile." Not a very large deposit, to be sure—only twenty thousand dollars, the purchase-money of a little tract of land somewhere in Eastern Ohio, which had hung like a dead weight upon the hands of two generations of the Ewing family, costing a small fortune in taxes, and bringing no return whatever. One hundred dollars would have bought it, and the thanks of the owner, five years ago. Many a time when I fixed over my old summer bonnet with fall trimmings, I thought of that barren tract, and wished I only had the original money paid for it, with the interest accruing since, and all accumulation of taxes. I made a computation once of how much would be the amount. I should have been independently rich.

But a strange man came to the house one day and asked for my husband. Through the sitting-room door I heard him make an offer of ten thousand dollars for the Ohio land. I could see that James was flattered and pleased with so large a sum for what he had considered as worthless. He would have closed the bargain at once. I coughed faintly. To my great satisfaction he took the hint and came into the kitchen.

"I knew you was listening," he said, "what do you want?"

"Twenty thousand dollars," I said, hurriedly. "Not a cent less."

"Pshaw! you're a goose, Martha, he never would give it. Why, the land isn't worth one-tenth of what he offers me now."

"Yes, he will give it. You try, and see."

"Well, just to please you. But I know it will be of no use."

But it was of use as the sequel proved, and I felt no little satisfaction in my part of the transaction when three days later Mr. Ewing allowed me to feast my eyes upon bonds and securities to the amount of twenty thousand dollars.

"Now James," said I, "not a word of this

to anybody. I am not going to be classed with the 'shoddy' and 'petroleum' mushrooms, I can tell you. We can use the money quietly, and none of our neighbors be the wiser. It is very comfortable to feel that you possess it, but not at all necessary to make any display. I shall even make the old parlor carpet do during the summer, and we will defer the new sofa until next year."

So three months had passed, and in the meantime I had done my own work, as usual, made over my mantilla, and not even the children knew of our good fortune.

But Providence seemed to have thrown Biddy again into our family, and as our means would allow it, and I thought it might be done without exciting remark, I concluded to keep her. It was a pleasant sight to see the broad smile which rested on her round, red face when I announced my determination to her, and as for the children, they fairly screamed with delight to get their old favorite back again.

After I had written the history of Biddy's adventures among the good folks of the village, as heretofore related, I submitted the whole to Mr. Ewing for his approval.

"Why," said he, "you have written much more about other people than about Biddy herself."

"And that is just what I intended to do, sir. I drained the ink bottle to Biddy's 'health,' not to her 'confusion.' I did not intend to betray her faults especially, but to describe some of the peculiarities in mistresses which servant girls are expected to receive patiently for months and years, but which we could not endure for a single day. Tell me now, candidly, what woman is there in all the circle of our acquaintance whose servant you would wish to be even for one short hour?"

"None but your own, madam," with a mocking bow.

"Well, I am not unconscious of my numerous faults, Mr. Ewing, even in my management of servants. I have but one rule—treat them as human beings and put upon them no more than you would yourself be willing to bear. In nine cases out of ten they will be respectful and docile, and form an attachment for you and yours which will continue as long as life shall last."

"An that's thrue for you, ma'am" said Biddy, who had come in unperceived a moment before, and stood awaiting her orders for Sunday dinner.

## SIR BROOK FOSSBROOKE.

### PART IV.—CHAPTER XIII.

#### LAST DAYS.

It may seem a hardship, but, not improbably, it is in its way an alleviation, that we are never involved in any of the great trials in life, without having to deal with certain material embarrassments, questions of vulgar interest which concern our pockets and affect our finances.

Poor Lendrick's was a case in point. He was about to leave his country—to tear himself from a home he had embellished—to separate from his children that he loved so dearly, to face a new life in a new land, friendless and alone; and with all these cares on his heart, he had creditors to satisfy, debts to insure payment of by security, and, not least of his troubles, his house to re-let. Now the value the world sets on that which is not for sale is very unlike its estimate for the same commodity when brought to market. The light claret your friend pronounced a very pleasant little wine at your own table, he would discover, when offered for purchase, to be poor, washy, and acrid. The horse you had lent him, and whose performance he had encomiumised, if put up to auction, would be found spavined, or wind-galled, or broken down. Such a stern test is money, so fearfully does its coarse jingle jar upon all the music of flattery, and make discord of all compliment. To such a pitch is the process carried, that even pretty women, who as wives were objects of admiration to despairing and disappointed adorers, have become, by widowhood, very ordinary creatures, simply because they are once more “in the market.”

It is well for us that Heaven itself was not in the *Price current*, or we might have begun to think lightly of it. At all events we'd have higgled about the cost, and tried to get there as cheaply as might be.

From the day that the Swan's Nest appeared in the Dublin papers “to be let furnished, for the three years of an unexpired term,” Lendrick was besieged by letters and applications. All the world apparently wanted the place, but wanted it in some way or other quite out of his power to accord. One insisted on having it unfurnished, and for a much longer period than he could give. Another desired more land, and the right of shooting over several hundred additional acres. A third would like the house and garden, but would not burden himself with the lawn, and could not see why Lendrick might not continue to hold the meadow land, and come back from the Cape or anywhere

else to mow the grass and rick it in due season.

A schoolmistress proposed he should build a dormitory for thirty young ladies, and make the flower-garden into a playground; and a miller from Limerick inquired whether he was willing to join in a suit to establish a right of water-power by diverting a stream from the Shannon through the dining-room to turn an undershot wheel.

It was marvellous with what patience and courtesy Lendrick replied to these and such-like, politely assuring the writers how he regretted his inability to meet their wishes, and modestly confessing that he had neither the money nor the time to make his house other than it was.

All these, however, were as nothing to his trials when the day arrived when the house and grounds, in the language of advertisement, were “on view,” and the world of the curious and idle were free to invade the place, stroll at will through rooms and gardens, comment and criticise not merely the objects before them, but the taste and the fortunes, the habits and the lives of those who had made this their home, and these things part of their own natures.

In a half-jesting humour, but really to save Lendrick from a mortification which to a nature timid and sensitive as his would have been torture, Sir Brook and Tom agreed to divide the labours of ciceroneship between them; the former devoting his attentions to the house and furniture, while Tom assumed the charge of grounds and gardens. To complete the arrangement, Lendrick and Lucy were banished to a small summer-house, and strictly enjoined never to venture abroad so long as the stranger horde overran the territory.

“I declare, my dear, I almost think the remedy worse than the disease,” said Lendrick to his daughter, as he paced with short feverish steps the narrow limits of his prison-house. “This isolation here has something secret, something that suggests shame about it. I think I could almost rather face all the remarks our visitors might make than sit down here to fancy and brood over them.”

“I suspect not, dearest papa; I believe the plan will spare us much that might pain us.”

“After all, child, these people have a right to be critical, and they are not bound to know by what associations you and I are tied to that old garden-seat, or that book-stand, and we ought to be able to avoid showing them this.”

“Perhaps we ought, papa; but could we do so? That's the question.”

"Surely the tradesman affects no such squeamishness about what he offers for sale."

"True, papa; because none of his wares have caught any clue to his identity. They have never been his in the sense which makes possession pleasure."

"I wish they would not laugh without there; their coarse laughter sounds to me so like vulgar ridicule. I hardly thought all this would have made me so irritable; even the children's voices jar on my nerves."

He turned away his head, but her eyes followed him, and two heavy tears stole slowly along her cheek, and her lip quivered as she looked.

"There, they are going away," said he, listening; "I am better now."

"That's right, dearest papa; I knew it was a mere passing pang," said she, drawing her arm within his, and walking along at his side. "How kind Sir Brook is!"

"How kind every one, we might say. Poor Mills is like a brother, and Tobin too—I scarcely expected so much heart from him. He gave me his old lancet-case as a keepsake yesterday, and I declare his voice trembled as he said good-bye."

"As for the poor people, I hear, papa, that one would think they had lost their nearest and dearest. Molly Dew says they were crying in her house this morning over their breakfast as if it was a funeral."

"Is it not strange, Lucy, that what touches the heart so painfully should help to heal the pang it gives? There is that in all this affection for us that gladdens while it grieves. All—all are so kind to us! That young fellow—Trafford I think his name is—he was waiting at the post for his letters this morning when I came up, and it seems that Fossbrooke had told him of my appointment—indiscreet of him, for I would not wish it talked of; but Trafford turned to him and said, 'Ask Dr. Lendrick, is he decided about going,' and when he heard that I was, he scarcely said good-bye, but jumped into a cab, and drove off at full speed."

"What does that mean?" asked I.

"He was so fond of Tom," said Fossbrooke, "they were never separate this last month or five weeks;" so you see, darling, each of us has his sphere of love and affection."

Lucy was crimson over face and neck, but never spoke a word. Had she spoken it would have been, perhaps, to corroborate Sir Brook, and to say, How fond the young men were of each other. I do not affirm this, I only hint that it is likely. Where

there are blanks in this narrative, the reader has as much right to fill them as myself.

"Sir Brook," continued Lendrick, "thinks well of the young man; but for my own part I hardly like to see Tom in close companionship with one so much his superior in fortune. He is easily led, and has not yet learned that stern lesson in life, how to confess that there are many things he has no pretension to aspire to."

"Tom loves you too sincerely, papa, ever to do that which would seriously grieve you."

"He would not deliberately—he would not in cold blood, Lucy; but young men when together have not many moods of deliberation or cold blood. But let us not speculate on trouble that may never come. It is enough for the present that he and Trafford are separated, if Trafford was even likely to lead him into ways of extravagance."

"What's that? Isn't it Tom? He's laughing heartily at something. Yes; here he comes."

"You may come out—the last of them has just driven off," cried Tom, knocking at the door, while he continued to laugh on immoderately.

"What is it, Tom? what are you laughing at?"

"You should have seen it; it's nothing to tell, but it was wonderful to witness. I'll never forget it as long as I live."

"But what was it?" asked she, impatiently.

"I thought we had fully done with all our visitors—and a rum set they were, most of them, not thinking of taking the place, but come out of mere curiosity—when who should drive up with two postilions and four spicy grays but Lady Drumcarron and a large party, three horsemen following. I just caught the word 'Excellency,' and found out from one of the servants that a tall old man with white hair and very heavy eyebrows was the Lord-Lieutenant. He stooped a good deal, and walked tenderly; and as the Countess was most eager about the grounds and the gardens, they parted company very soon, he going into the house to sit down, while she prosecuted her inquiries without doors."

"I took him into the library; we had a long chat about fishing, and fish-curing and the London markets, and flax, and national education, and land tenure, and such-like. Of course I affected not to know who he was, and I took the opportunity to say scores of impertinences about the stupidity of the

Castle, and the sort of men they send over here to govern us; and he asked me if I was destined for any career or profession, and I told him frankly that whenever I took up anything I always was sure to discover it was the one very thing that didn't suit me, and as I made this unlucky discovery in law, medicine, and the church, I had given up my college career, and was now in a sort of interregal period, wondering what it was to be next. I didn't like to own that the *res angustæ* had anything to say to it. It was no business of his to know about that.

"You surely have friends able and willing to suggest something that would fit you," said he. "Is not the Chief Baron your grandfather?"

"Yes, and he might make me crier of his court, but I think he has promised the reversion to his butler. The fact is, I'd not do over well with any fixed responsibilities attached to me. I'd rather be a guerilla than serve in the regulars, and so I'll just wait and see if something won't turn up in that undisciplined force I'd like to serve with."

"I'll give you my name," said he, "before we part, and possibly I may know some one who might be of use to you."

"I thanked him coolly, and we talked of something else, when there came a short plump little fellow, all beard and gold chains, to say that Lady Drumcarron was waiting for him. 'Tell her I'm coming,' said he; 'and, Balfour,' he cried out, 'before you go away, give this gentleman my address, and if he should call, take care that I see him.'

"Balfour eyed me and I eyed him, with, I take it, pretty much the same result, which said plainly enough, 'You're not the man for me.'

"What in heaven's name is this?" cried the Viceroy, as he got outside and saw Lady Drumcarron at the head of a procession carrying plants, slips, and flower-pots down to the carriage.

"Her ladyship has made a raid amongst the greeneries," said Balfour, "and tipped the head-gardener, that tall fellow there with the yellow rose-tree; as the place is going to be sold, she thought she might well do a little genteel pillage." Curious to see who our gardener could be, all the more that he was said to be 'tall,' I went forward, and what do you think I saw? Sir Brook, with a flower-pot under one arm and a quantity of cuttings under the other, walking a little after the Countess, who was evidently giving him ample directions as to her intentions. I could scarcely re-

frain from an outburst of laughing, but I got away into the shrubbery and watched the whole proceedings. I was too far off to hear, but this much I saw. Sir Brook had deposited his rose-tree and his slips on the rumble, and stood beside the carriage with his hat off. When his Excellency came up a sudden movement took place in the group, and the Viceroy, seeming to push his way through the others, cried out something I could not catch, and then grasped Sir Brook's hand with both his own. All was tumult in a moment. My lady, in evident confusion and shame—that much I could see—was curtsying deeply to Sir Brook, who seemed not to understand her apologies; at least he appeared stately and courteous, as usual, and not in the slightest degree put out or chagrined by the incident. Though Lady Drumcarron was profuse of her excuses, and most eager to make amends for her mistake, the Viceroy took Sir Brook's arm and led him off to a little distance, where they talked together for a few moments.

"It's a promise, then, Fossbrooke—you promise me!" cried he aloud, as he approached the carriage.

"Rely upon me,—and within a week or ten days at farthest," said Sir Brook, as they drove away.

"I have not seen him since, and I scarcely know if I shall be able to meet him without laughing."

"Here he comes," cried Lucy; "and take care, Tom, that you do nothing that might offend him."

The caution was so far unnecessary that Sir Brook's manner, as he drew near, had a certain stately dignity that invited no railery.

"You have been detained a long time a prisoner, Dr. Lendrick," said Fossbrooke, calmly; "but your visitors were so charmed with all they saw, that they lingered on, unwilling to take their leave."

"Tom tells me we had some of our county notabilities—Lord and Lady Drumcarron, the Lacys, and others," said Lendrick.

"Yes; and the Lord-Lieutenant too, whom I used to know at Christ Church. He would have been well pleased to have met you. He told me your father was the ablest and most brilliant talker he ever knew."

"Ah! we are very unlike," said Lendrick, blushing modestly. "Did he give any hint as to whether his party are pleased or the reverse with my father's late conduct?"

"He only said, 'I wish you knew him, Fossbrooke; I sincerely wish you knew him, if only to assure him that he will meet far more generous treatment from us than from the Opposition.' He added, that we were men to suit each other; and this, of course, was a flattery for which I am very grateful."

"And the tall man with the stoop was the Lord-Lieutenant?" asked Tom. "I passed half an hour or more with him in the library, and he invited me to call upon him, and told a young fellow, named Balfour, to give me his address, which he forgot to do."

"We can go together, if you have no objection; for I, too, have promised to pay my respects," said Sir Brook.

Tom was delighted at the suggestion, but whispered in his sister's ear, as they passed out into the garden, "I thought I'd have burst my sides laughing when I met him; but it's the very last thing in my thoughts now. I declare I'd as soon pull a tiger's whiskers as venture on the smallest liberty with him."

"I think you are right, Tom," said she, squeezing his arm affectionately, to show that she not only agreed with him, but was pleased that he had given her the opportunity of doing so.

"I wonder is he telling the governor what happened this morning? It can scarcely be that, though, they look so grave."

"Papa seems agitated, too," said Lucy.

"I just caught Trafford's name as they passed. I hope he's not saying anything against him. It is not only that Lionel Trafford is as good a fellow as ever lived, but that he fully believes Fossbrooke likes him. I don't think he could be so false; do you, Lucy?"

"I'm certain he is not. There, papa is beckoning to you; he wants you;" and Lucy turned hurriedly away, anxious to conceal her emotion, for her cheeks were burning, and her lips trembled with agitation.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### TOM CROSS-EXAMINES HIS SISTER.

It was decided on that evening that Sir Brook and Tom should set out for Dublin the next morning. Lucy knew not why this sudden determination had been come to, and Tom, who never yet had kept a secret from her, was now reserved and un-

communicative. Nor was it merely that he held aloof his confidence, but he was short and snappish in his manner as though she had somehow vexed him, and vexed him in some shape that he could not openly speak of or resent.

This was very new to her from him, and yet how was it? She had not courage to ask for an explanation. Tom was not exactly one of those people of whom it was pleasant to ask explanations. Where the matter to be explained might be one of delicacy, he had a way of abruptly blurt-ing out the very thing one would have desired might be kept back. Just as an awkward surgeon will tear off the dressing, and set a wound a-bleeding, would he rudely destroy the work of time in healing by a moment of rash impatience. It was knowing this—knowing it well—that deterred Lucy from asking what might lead to something not over-agreeable to hear.

"Shall I pack your portmanteau, Tom?" asked she. It was a task that always fell to her lot.

"No; Nicholas can do it—any one can do it," said he, as he mumbled with an un-lit cigar between his teeth.

"You used to say I always did it best, Tom—that I never forgot anything," said she, caressingly.

"Perhaps I did—perhaps I thought so. Look here, Lucy," said he, as though by an immense effort he had got strength to say what he wanted, "I'm half-vexed with you, if not more than half."

"Vexed with me, Tom—vexed with me / and for what?"

"I don't think that you need ask. I am inclined to believe that you know perfectly well what I mean, and what I would much rather not say, if you will only let me."

"I do not," said she, slowly and deliberately.

"Do you mean to say, Lucy," said he, and his manner was almost stern as he spoke, "that you have no secrets from me? that you are as frank and outspoken with me to-day as you were three months ago?"

"I do say so."

"Then, what's the meaning of this letter?" cried he, as, carried away by a burst of passion, he overstepped all the prudential reserve he had sworn to himself to regard. "What does this mean?"

"I know nothing of that letter, nor what it contains," said she, blushing till her very brow became crimson.

"I don't suppose you do, for though it is addressed to you, the seal is unbroken; but you know whose handwriting it's in, and



you know that you have had others from the same quarter."

"I believe the writing is Mr. Trafford's," said she, as a deathlike paleness spread over her face, "because he himself once asked me to read a letter from him in the same handwriting."

"Which you did?"

"No; I refused. I handed the letter back to him unopened, and said, that, as I certainly should not write to him without my father's knowledge and permission, I would not read a letter from him without the same."

"And what was the epistle, then, that the Vicar's housekeeper handed him from you?"

"That same letter I have spoken of. He left it on my table, insisting and believing that on second thoughts I would read it. He thought so because it was not to me though addressed to me, but the copy of a letter he had written to his mother, about me certainly." Here she blushed deeply again. "As I continued, however, of the same mind, determined not to see what the letter contained, I re-enclosed it and gave it to Mrs. Brennan to hand to him."

"And all this you kept a secret from me?"

"It was not my secret. It was his. It was his till such time as he could speak of it to my father, and this he told me had not yet come."

"Why not?"

"I never asked him that. I do not think, Tom," said she, with much emotion, "it was such a question as you would have had me ask."

"Do you love—come, darling Lucy, don't be angry with me. I never meant to wound your feelings. Don't sob that way, my dear, dear Lucy. You know what a rough coarse fellow I am, but I'd rather die than offend you. Why did you not tell me of all this? I never liked any one so well as Trafford, and why leave me to the chance of misconstruing him? Wouldn't it have been the best way to have trusted me as you always have?"

"I don't see what there was to have confided to you. Mr. Trafford might, if he wished. I mean that if there was a secret at all. I don't know what I mean," cried she, covering her face with her handkerchief, while a convulsive motion of her shoulders showed how she was moved.

"I am as glad as if I had got a thousand pounds, to know you have been so right, so thoroughly right, in all this, Lucy; and I am glad, too, that Trafford has done nothing to make me think less well of him. Let's

be friends—give me your hand, like a dear, good girl, and forgive me if I have said what pained you."

"I am not angry, Tom," said she, giving her hand, but with her head still averted.

"God knows, it's not the time for us to fall out," said he, with a shaking voice. "Going to separate as we are, and when to be together again not so easy to imagine."

"You are surely going out with papa?" asked she, eagerly.

"No; they say not."

"Who says not?"

"The governor himself—Sir Brook—old Mills—everybody, in fact. They have held a committee of the whole house on it. I think Nicholas was present too; and it has been decided that as I am very much given to idleness, bitter beer, and cigars, I ought not to be anywhere where these ingredients compose the chief part of existence. Now the Cape is precisely one of these places; and if you abstract the idleness, the bitter beer, and the tobacco, there is nothing left but a little Hottentotism, which is neither pleasant nor profitable. Voted, therefore, I am not to go to the Cape. It is much easier, however, to open the geography books, and show all the places I am unfit for, than to hit upon the one that will suit me. And so I am going up to Dublin to-morrow with Sir Brook to consult—I don't well know whom, perhaps a fortune-teller—what's to be done with me. All I do know is, I am to see my grandfather, and to wait on the Viceroy, and I don't anticipate that any of us will derive much pleasure from the event."

"Oh, Tom! what happiness it would be to me if grandpapa"—she stopped, blushed, and tried in vain to go on.

"Which is about the least likely thing in the world, Lucy," said he, answering her unspoken sentence. "I am just the sort of creature he couldn't abide; not to add that, from all I have heard of him, I'd rather take three years with hard labour at the hulks than live with him. It will do very well with you. You have patience, and a soft, forgiving disposition. You'll fancy yourself, besides, heaven knows what of a heroine, for submitting to his atrocious temper, and imagine slavery to be martyrdom. Now, I couldn't. I'd let him understand that I was one of the family, and had a born right to be as ill-tempered, as selfish, and as unmannerly as any other Lendrick."

"But if he should like you, Tom? If you made a favorable impression upon him when you met?"

"If I should, I think I'd go over to South Carolina and ask some one to buy me as a negro, for I'd know in my heart it was all I could be fit for."

"Oh! my dear, dear Tom, I wish you would meet him in a different spirit, if only for poor papa's sake. You know what store he lays by grandpapa's affection."

"I see it, and it puzzles me. If any one should continue to ill-treat me for five-and-twenty years, I'd not think of beginning to forgive him till after fifty more, and I'm not quite sure I'd succeed then."

"But you are to meet him, Tom," said she, hopefully. "I trust much to your meeting."

"That's more than I do, Lucy. Indeed, I'd not go at all except on the condition which I have made with myself, to accept nothing from him. I had not meant to tell you this; but it has escaped me, and can't be helped. Don't hang your head and pout your lip over that bad boy brother Tom. I intend to be as submissive and as humble in our interview as if I was going to owe my life to him, just because I want him to be very kind and gracious to you; and I'd not wish to give him any reason for saying harsh things of me, which would hurt you to listen to. If I only knew how—and I protest I do not—I'd even try and make a favorable impression upon him; for I'd like to be able to come and see you, Lucy, now and then, and it would be a sore blow to me if he forbade me."

"You don't think I'd remain under his roof if he should do so?" asked she, indignantly.

"Not if you saw him turn me away—shutting the door in my face; but what scores of civil ways there are of intimating that one is not welcome! But why imagine all these?—none of them may happen; and as Sir Brook says, the worst misfortunes of life are those that never come to us; and I, for one, am determined to deal only with real, actual, present enemies. Isn't he a rare old fellow?—don't you like him, Lucy?"

"I like him greatly."

"He loves you, Lucy—he told me so; he said you were so like a girl whose godfather he was, and that he had loved her as if she were his own. Whether she had died, or whether something had happened that estranged them, I couldn't make out; but he said you had raised up some old, half-dead embers in his heart, and kindled a flame where he had thought all was to be cold for ever; and the tears came into his eyes, and that great deep voice of his grew

fainter and fainter, and something that sounded like a sob stopped him. I always knew he was a brave, stout-hearted, gallant fellow; but that he could feel like this I never imagined. I almost think it was some girl he was going to be married to once that you must be so like. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know; I cannot even guess," said she, slowly.

"It's not exactly the sort of nature where one would expect to find much sentiment; but, as he said one day, some old hearts are like old chateaux, with strange old chambers in them that none have traversed for years and years, and with all the old furniture moth-eaten and crumbling, but standing just where it used to be. I'd not wonder if it was of himself he was speaking."

She remained silent and thoughtful, and he went on,—"There's a deal of romance under that quaint, stern exterior. What do you think he said this morning?—'Your father's heart is wrapped up in this place, Tom; let us set to work to make money and buy it for him.' I did not believe he was serious, and I said some stupid nonsense about a diamond necklace and earrings for you on the day of presentation; and he turned upon me with a fierce look, and in a voice trembling with anger said, 'Well, sir, and whom would they become better? Is it her birth or her beauty would disparage them, if they were the jewels of a crown?' I know I'll not cross another whim of his in the same fashion again; though he came to my room afterwards to make an apology for the tone in which he had spoken, and assured me it should never be repeated."

"I hope you told him you had not felt offended."

"I did more—I did at least what pleased him more—I said I was delighted with that plan of his about buying up the Nest, and that the very thought gave a zest to any pursuit I might engage in; and so, Lucy, it is settled between us that if his Excellency won't make me something with a fine salary and large perquisites, Sir Brook and I are to set out, I'm not very sure where, and we are to do, I'm not quite certain what; but two such clever fellows, uniting experience with energy, can't fail, and the double event—I mean the estate and the diamonds—are just as good as won already. Well, what do you want, Nicholas?" cried Tom, as the grim old man put his head inside the door and retired again, mumbling something as he went. "Oh, I remember it now; he has

was tormenting the governor all day about getting him some place — some situation or other, and the old rascal thinks we are the most ungrateful wretches under the sun, to be so full of our own affairs and so forgetful of his: we are certainly not likely to leave him unprovided for; he can't imagine that.

"Here he comes again. My father is gone in to Killaloe, Nicholas; but don't be uneasy, he'll not forget you."

"Forgettin's one thing, Master Tom, and rememberin' the right way is another," said Nicholas, sternly. "I told him yesterday, and I repeated it to-day, I won't go among them Hottentots."

"Has he asked you?"

"Did he ask me?" repeated the old man, leaning forward and eyeing him fiercely — "did he ask me?"

"My brother means, Nicholas, that papa couldn't expect you to go so far away from your home and your friends."

"And where's my home and my friends?" cried the irascible old fellow; "and I forty-eight years in the family? Is that the way to have a home or friends either?"

"No, Tom, no — I entreat — I beg of you," said Lucy, standing between her brother and the old man, and placing her hand on Tom's lips; "you know well that he can't help it."

"That's just it," cried Nicholas, catching the words; "I can't help it, I'm too old to help it. It isn't after eight-and-forty years one ought to be looking out for new service."

"Papa hopes that grandpapa will have no objection to taking you, Nicholas; he means to write about it to-day; but if there should be a difficulty, he has another place."

"Maybe I'm to 'list and be a sodger — faix it wouldn't be much worse than going back to your grandfather."

"Why, you discontented old fool," burst in Tom, "haven't you been teasing our souls out these ten years back by your stories of the fine life you led in the Chief Baron's house?"

"The eatin' was better, and the drinkin' was better," said Nicholas, resolutely. "Wherever the devil it comes from, the small beer here bangs Banagher; but for the matter of temper he was one of yourselves! and by my sowl it's a family not easily matched!"

"I agree with you; any other man than my father would have pitched you neck and crop into the Shannon years ago — I'll be shot if I wouldn't."

"Mind them words. What you said

there is a threat — it's what the law makes a constructive threat, and we'll see what the Courts say to it."

"I declare, Nicholas, you would provoke any one; you will let no one be your friend," said Lucy; and taking her brother's arm she led him away, while the old man, watching them till they entered the shrubbery, seated himself leisurely in a deep arm-chair, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "By my conscience," muttered he, "it takes two years off my life every day I have to keep yez in order."

## CHAPTER XV.

### MR. HAIRE'S MISSION.

ALTHOUGH the Chief Baron had assured Haire that his mission had no difficulty about it, that he'd find her ladyship would receive him in a very courteous spirit, and, finally, that "he'd do the thing" admirably, the unhappy little lawyer approached his task with considerable misgivings, which culminated in actual terror as he knocked at the door of the house where Lady Lendrick resided in Merrion Square, and sent up his name.

"The ladies are still in committee, sir," said a bland-looking, usher-like personage, who, taking up Haire's card from the salver, scanned the name with a half supercilious look.

"In committee! ah, indeed, I was not aware," stammered out Haire. "I suspect — that is — I have reason to believe her ladyship is aware — I mean my name is not unknown to Lady Lendrick — would you kindly present my card?"

"Take it up, Bates," said the man in black, and then turned away to address another person, for the hall was crowded with people of various conditions and ranks, and who showed in their air and manner a something of anxiety, if not of impatience.

"Mr. MacClean — where's Mr. MacClean?" cried a man in livery, as he held forth a square-shaped letter. "Is Mr. MacClean there?"

"Yes. I'm Mr. MacClean," said a red-faced, fussy-looking man. "I'm Mr. George Henry MacClean of 41 Mount Street."

"Two tickets for Mr. MacClean," said the usher, handing him the letter with a polite bow.

"Mr. Nolan, Balls Bridge — does any one represent Mr. Nolan of Balls Bridge?" said the usher, haughtily.

"That's me," said a short man, who wiped the perspiration from his face with a

red-spotted handkerchief as large as a small bedquilt — "that's me."

"The references not satisfactory, Mr. Nolan," said the usher, reading from a paper in his hand.

"Not satisfactory? — what do you mean? Is Peter Arkins, Esquire, of Clontarf, unsatisfactory? Is Mr. Ryland of Abbey Street unsatisfactory?"

"I am really, sir, unable to afford you the explanation you desire. I am simply deputed by her Ladyship to return the reply that I find written here. The noise is really so great here, I can hear nothing. Who are you asking for, Bates?"

"Mr. Mortimer O'Hagan."

"He's gone away," cried a voice; "he was here since eleven o'clock."

"Application refused. Will some one tell Mr. O'Hagan his application is refused?" said the usher, austere.

"Might I be bold enough to ask what is going forward?" whispered Haire.

"Mr. W. Haire, Ely Place," shouted out the man in livery. "Card refused for want of a reference."

"You ought to have sent up two names — well-known names, Mr. Haire," said the usher, with a politeness that seemed marked. "It's not too late yet; let me see," and he looked at his watch, "we want a quarter to one; be back here in half-an-hour. Take a car — you'll find one at the door. Get your names, and I'll see if I can't do it for you."

"I am afraid I don't understand you, and I am sure you don't understand me. I came here by appointment" — The rest of the sentence was lost by a considerable bustle and movement that now ensued, for a number of ladies descended the stairs, chatting and laughing freely; while servants rushed hither and thither, calling up carriages, or inquiring for others not yet come. The usher, frantically pushing the crowd aside to clear a path for the ladies, was profuse of apologies for the confusion; adding at the same time that "it was twice as bad an hour ago. There weren't less than two hundred here this morning."

A number of little pleasantries passed as the bland usher handed the ladies to their carriages; and it was evident by their laughter that his remarks were deemed pungent and witty. Meanwhile the hall was becoming deserted. The persons who had crowded there, descending singly or in groups, went their several ways, leaving Haire the only one behind. "And now, sir," said the usher, "you see it's all over.

You wouldn't take my advice. They are all gone, and it's the last meeting."

"Will you favour me so far as to say for what did they meet? What was the object of the gathering?"

"I suppose, sir, you are not a reader of the morning papers?"

"Occasionally. Indeed I always glance at them."

"Well, sir, and has not your glance fallen upon the announcement of the ball — the grand ball to be given at the Rotundo for the orphan asylum called the 'Rogues' Redemptory,' at Rathmines, at the head of whose patronesses stands my lady's name?"

Haire shook his head in negative.

"And have you not come like the rest with an application for permission to attend the ball?"

"No; I have come to speak to Lady Lendrick, — and by appointment too."

A faint but prolonged whistle expressed the usher's astonishment, and he turned and whispered a few words to a footman at his side. He disappeared, and returned in a moment to say that her ladyship would see Mr. Haire.

"I trust you will forgive me, sir," said said Lady Lendrick — a very large, very showy, and still handsome woman — as she motioned him to be seated. "I got your card when my head was so full of this tiresome ball, and I made the absurd mistake of supposing you came for tickets. You are, I think your note says, an old friend of Mr. Thomas Lendrick?"

"I am an old friend of his father's, madam! The Chief Baron and myself were schoolfellows."

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt," said she, hurriedly; "but from your note — I have it here somewhere," and she rummaged amongst a lot of papers that littered the table — "your note gave me to understand that your visit to me regarded Mr. Thomas Lendrick, and not the Chief Baron. It is possible, however, I may have mistaken your meaning. I wish I could find it. I laid it out of my hand a moment ago. Oh, here it is! now we shall see which of us is right," and with a sort of triumph she opened the letter and read aloud, shurring over the few commencing lines till she came to "that I may explain to your ladyship the circumstances by which Mr. Thomas Lendrick's home will for the present be broken up, and entreat of you to extend to his daughter the same kind interest and favour you have so constantly extended to her father." "Now, sir, I hope I may

say that it is not I have been mistaken. If I read this passage aright, it bespeaks my consideration for a young lady who will shortly need a home and a protectress."

"I suppose I expressed myself very ill. I mean, madam, I take it, that in my endeavour not to employ any abruptness, I may have fallen into some obscurity. Shall I own, besides," added he, with a tone of half-desperation in his voice, "that I had no fancy for this mission of mine at all—that I undertook it wholly against my will? Baron Lendrick's broken health, my old friendship for him, his insistence, and you can understand what *that* is, eh?"—he thought she was about to speak; but she only gave a faint equivocal sort of smile, and he went on—"All these together overcame my scruples, and I agreed to come." He paused here as though he had made the fullest and most ample explanation, and that it was now her turn to speak. "Well, sir," said she, "go on: I am all ears for your communication."

"There it is: that's the whole of it, madam. You are to understand distinctly that with the arrangement itself I had no concern whatever. Baron Lendrick never asked my advice: I never tendered it. I'm not sure that I should have concurred with his notions—but that's nothing to the purpose; all that I consented to was to come here, to tell you the thing is so, and why it is so—there;" and with this he wiped his forehead, for the exertion had heated and fatigued him.

"I know I'm very dull, very slow of comprehension, and in compassion for this defect, will you kindly make your explanation a little, a very little, fuller? What is it that is *so*?" and she emphasized the last word with a marked sarcasm in her tone.

"Oh, I quite see that your ladyship may not quite like it. There is no reason why you should like it—all things considered; but, after all, it may turn out very well. If she suit him, if she can hit it off with his temper—and she may—young folks have often more forbearance than older ones—there's no saying what it may lead to."

"Once for all, sir," said she, haughtily, for her temper was sorely tried, "what is this thing which I am not to like, and yet bound to bear?"

"I don't think I said that; I trust I never said your ladyship was bound to bear anything. So well as I can recall the Chief Baron's words,—and, God forgive me, but I wish I was—no matter what or where—when I heard them,—this is the

substance of what he said: 'Tell her,' meaning your ladyship—'tell her that, rightly understood, the presence of my granddaughter as mistress of my house'—"

"What do you say, sir?—is Miss Lendrick coming to reside at the Priory?"

"Of course—what else have I been saying this half-hour?"

"To take the position of lady of the house?" said she, not deigning to notice his question.

"Just so, madam."

"I declare, sir, bold as the step is,"—she arose as she spoke, and drew herself haughtily up—"bold as the step is, it is not half so bold as your own courage in coming to tell of it. What the Chief Baron had not the hardihood to communicate in writing, you dare to deliver to me by word of mouth—you dare to announce to me that my place, the station I ought to fill, is to be occupied by another, and that whenever I pass the threshold of the Priory, I come as the guest of Lucy Lendrick! I do hope, sir, I may attribute to the confusion of your faculties—a confusion of which this short interview has given me proof—that you really never rightly apprehended the ignominy of the mission your friend intrusted to you."

"You're right there," said he, placing both his hands on the side of his head; "confusion is just the name for it."

"Yes, sir; but I apprehend you must have undertaken this office in a calm moment, and let me ask you how you could have lent yourself to such a task? You are aware, for the whole world is aware, that in living apart from the Chief Baron, I am yielding to a necessity imposed by his horrible, his insufferable temper; now how long will this explanation be valid, if my place, in any respect, should be occupied by another? The isolation in which he now lives, his estrangement from the world, serve to show that he has withdrawn from society, and accepted the position of a recluse. Will this continue now? will these be the habits of the house with a young lady at its head, free to indulge all the caprices of ignorant girlhood? I declare, sir, I wonder how a little consideration for your friend might not have led you to warn him against the indiscretion he was about to commit. 'The slight to me,' said she, sarcastically, and flushing deeply, "it was possible you might overlook; but I scarcely see how you could have forgotten the stain that must attach to that 'large intellect—that wise and truly great man.' I am quoting a paragraph I read in the 'Post' this

morning, with which, perhaps, you are familiar."

"I did not see it," said Haire, helplessly.

"I declare, sir, I was unjust enough to think you wrote it: I thought no one short of him who had come on your errand to-day could have been the author."

"Well, I wish with all my heart I'd never come," said he, with a melancholy gesture of his hands.

"I declare, sir, I am not surprised at your confession. I suppose you are not aware that in the very moment adopted for this—this—this new establishment, there is something like studied insult to me. It is only ten days ago I mentioned to the Chief Baron that my son, Colonel Sewell, was coming back from India on a sick leave. He has a wife and three little children, and, like most soldiers, is not over well off. I suggested that, as the Priory was a large roomy house, with abundant space for many people without in the slightest degree interfering with each other, he should offer the Sewells to take them in. I said nothing more—nothing about *ménage*—no details of any kind. I simply said: 'Couldn't you give the Sewells the rooms that look out on the back lawn? Nobody ever enters them; even when you receive in the summer evenings they are not opened. It would be a great boon to an invalid to be housed so quietly, so removed from all noise and bustle.' And to mark how I intended no more, I added, 'They wouldn't bore you, nor need you ever see them unless you wished for it.' And what was his reply? 'Madam, I never liked soldiers. I'm not sure that his young wife wouldn't be displeasing to me, and I know that his children would be insufferable.'

"I said, 'Let me take the dear children then.' 'Do, by all means, and their dear parents also,' he broke in: 'I should be in despair if I thought I had separated you.' Yes, sir, I give you his very words. 'This wise and truly great man, or truly wise and great—which is it?—had nothing more generous nor more courteous to say to me than a sarcasm and an impertinence. Are you not proud of your friend?'

Never was there a more unlucky peroration, from the day when Lord Denman conducted an eloquent defence of a queen's innocence by appealing to the unhappy illustration which called forth the touching words, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at her." Never was there a more signal blunder than to ask this man to repudiate the friendship which had formed the whole pride and glory of his life.

"I should think I am proud of him, madam," said he, rising and speaking with a boldness that amazed even himself. "I was proud to be his class-fellow at school. I was proud to sit in the same division with him in college—proud when he won his gold medal and carried off his fellowship. It was a proud day to me when I saw him take his seat on the bench, and my heart nearly burst with pride when he placed me on his right hand at dinner and told the Benchers and the Bar that we had walked the road of life together, and that the grasp of my hand—he called it my honest hand—had been the ever-present earnest of each success he had achieved in his career. Yes, madam, I am very proud of him; and my heart must be cold indeed before I cease to be proud of him."

"I declare, sir, you astonish, you amaze me. I was well aware how that truly great and wise man had often inspired the eloquence of attack. Many have assailed—many have vituperated him; but that any one should have delivered a panegyric on the inestimable value of his friendship! his friendship of all things!—is what I was not prepared for."

Haire heard the ringing raillery of her laugh, he was stung by he knew not what tortures of her scornful impertinence; bitter, biting words, very cruel words too, fell over and around him like a sort of hail; they beat on his face and rattled over his head and shoulders: he was conscious of a storm, and conscious too that he sought neither shelter nor defence, but only tried to fly before the hurricane, whither he knew not.

How he quitted that room, descended the stairs, and escaped from the house, he never was able to recall. He was far away outside the city wandering along through an unfrequented suburb ere he came to his full consciousness, murmuring to himself ever as he went—What a woman, what a woman! what a temper—ay, and what a tongue!

Without any guidance of his own—with-out any consciousness of it—he walked on and on, till he found himself at the gate-lodge of the Priory; a carriage was just passing in, and he stopped to ask whose it was. It was the Chief Baron's grand-daughter, who had arrived that morning by train. He turned back when he heard this, and returned to town. "Whether you like it or not, Lady Lendrick, it is done now, and there's no good in carrying on the issue after the verdict;" and with this reflection, embodying possibly as much wisdom as his

whole career career had taught him, he hastened homeward, secretly determining, if he possibly could, never to reveal anything to the Chief Baron of his late interview with Lady Lendrick.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SORROWS AND PROJECTS.

DR. LENDRICK and his son still lingered at the Swan's Nest after Lucy's departure for the Priory. Lendrick, with many things to arrange and prepare for his coming voyage, was still so overcome by the thought of breaking up his home and parting from his children, that he could not address his mind to anything like business. He would wander about for hours through the garden and the shrubberies, taking leave, as he called it, of his dear plants and flowers, and come back to the house, distressed and miserable. Often and often would he declare to Sir Brook, who was his guest, that the struggle was too much for him. "I never was a man of arduous or energy, and it is not now, when I have passed the middle term of life, that I am to hope for that spring and elasticity which were denied to my youth. Better for me send for Lucy, and stay where I am; nowhere shall I be so happy again." Then would come the sudden thought that all this was mere selfishness, that in this life of inaction and indolence he was making no provision for that dear girl he loved so well. Whatever hopes the reconciliation with his father might lead to would of course be utterly scattered to the winds by an act so full of disobedience as this. "It is true," thought he, "I may fail abroad as I have failed at home. Success and I are scarcely on speaking terms—but the grandfather cannot leave the grand-daughter whom he has taken from her home, totally uncares and unprovided for."

As for young Tom, Sir Brook had pledged himself to take care of him. It was a vague expression enough; it might mean anything, everything, or nothing. Sir Brook Fossbrooke had certainly, in worldly parlance, not taken very good care of himself—far from it; he had squandered and made away with two large estates and an immense sum in ready money. It was true he had friends everywhere—some of them very great people with abundant influence, and well able to help those they cared for; but Fossbrooke was not one of those who ask; and the world has not yet come to the millennial beatitude in which one's friends importune them with inquiries how they are to be helped, what and where they wish for.

Many a time in the course of country-house life—at breakfast, as the post came in, and during the day, as a messenger would deliver a telegram—some great man would say, "There is a vacancy there—such a one has died—so-and-so has retired. There's a thing to suit you, Fossbrooke,"—and Sir Brook would smile, say a word or two that implied nothing, and so would end the matter. If my "Lord" ever retained any memory of the circumstance some time after, it would be that he had offered something to Fossbrooke who wouldn't take it, didn't care for it. For so is it throughout life; the event which to one is the veriest trifle of the hour, is to another a fate and a fortune; and then, great folk who lead lives of ease and security are very prone to forget that humble men have often a pride very disproportioned to their condition, and are timidly averse to stretch out the hand for what it is just possible it may not be intended they should touch.

At all events, Fossbrooke went his way through the world a mystery to many and a puzzle—some averring that it was a shame to his friends in power that he had "got nothing," others as stoutly declaring that he was one whom no office would tempt, nor would any place requite him for the loss of liberty and independence.

He himself was well aware of each of these theories, but too proud to say a word to those who professed either of them. If, however, he was too haughty to ask for himself, he was by no means above being a suitor for his friends; and many a one owed to his active solicitude the advancement which none stood more in need of than himself.

"We shall make the Viceroy do something for us, Tom," he would say. "Think over what it shall be—for that's the invariable question—What is it you want? And it's better far to say, Make me an archbishop, than have to own that you want anything, and are, maybe, fit for nothing."

Though Lendrick was well disposed towards Fossbrooke, and fully sensible of his manly honesty and frankness, he could not help seeing that he was one of those impulsive sanguine natures that gain nothing from experience beyond the gift of companionship. They acquire all that can make them delightful in society—boons they are—and especially to those whose more prudent temperament inclines them to employ their gifts more profitably. Scores of these self-made men, rich to overflowing with all that wealth could buy around them, would say, What a happy fellow was Fossbrooke!

what a blessing it was to have his nature, his spirits, buoyancy, and such-like — to be able to enjoy life as he did. Perhaps they believed all that they said, too — who knows? When they made such speeches to himself, as they would at times, he heard them with the haughty humility of one who hears himself praised for that which the flatterer deems a thing too low for envy. He well understood how cheaply others estimated his wares, for they were a scrip that figured in no share-list, and never were quoted at a premium.

Lendrick read him very correctly, and naturally thought that a more practical and a more worldly guide would have been better for Tom — some one to hold him back, not to urge him forward; some one to whisper prudence, restraint, denial, not daring, and dash, and indulgence. But somehow these slightly, imaginative, speculative men have very often a wonderful persuasiveness about them, and can give to the wildest dreams a marvellous air of substance and reality. A life so full of strange vicissitudes as Fossbrooke's seemed a guarantee for any — no matter what — turn of fortune. Hear him tell of where he had been, what he had done, and with whom, and you at once felt you were in presence of one to whom no ordinary laws of worldly caution or prudence applied.

That his life had compassed many failures and few successes was plain enough. He never sought to hide the fact. Indeed, he was candour itself in his confessions, only that he accompanied them by little explanations, showing the exact spot and moment in which he had lost the game. It was wonderful what credit he seemed to derive from these disclosures. It was like an honest trader showing his balance-sheet to prove that, but for the occurrence of such ills as no prudence could ward off, his condition must have been one of prosperity.

Never did he say anything more truthful than that "he had not ever cared for money." So long as he had it he used it lavishly, thoughtlessly, very often generously. When he ceased to have it, the want scarcely appeared to touch him personally. Indeed, it was only when some necessity presented itself to aid this one, or extricate that, he would suddenly remember his impotence to be of use, and then the sting of his poverty would sorely pain him.

Like all men who have suffered reverses, he had to experience the different acceptance he met with in his days of humble fortune from what greeted him in his era of prosperity. If he felt this, none could de-

test it. His bearing and manner betrayed nothing of such consciousness. A very slight increase of stateliness might possibly have marked him in his poverty, and an air of more reserved dignity, which showed itself in his manner to strangers. In all other respects he was the same.

That such a character should have exercised a great influence over a young man like Tom Lendrick — ardent, impetuous, and desirous of adventure — was not strange.

"We must make a fortune for Lucy, Tom," said Sir Brook. "Your father's nature is too fine strung to be a money-maker, and she must be cared for." This was a desire which he continued to utter day after day; and though Fossbrooke usually smoked on after he had said it without any intimation as to where, and when, and how this same fortune was to be amassed, Tom Lendrick placed the most implicit faith in the assurance that it would be done "somehow."

One morning as Lendrick was walking with his son in the garden, making, as he called it, his farewell visit to his tulips and moss-roses, he asked Tom if any fixed plan had been decided on as to his future.

"We have got several, sir. The difficulty is the choice. Sir Brook was at one time very full of buying a great tract in Donegal, and stocking it with all sorts of wild animals. We began with deer, antelopes, and chamois; and last night we got to wolves, bears, and a tiger. We were to have a most commodious shooting-box, and invite parties to come and sport, who, instead of going to Bohemia, the Rocky Mountains, and to Africa, would find all their savagery near home, and pay us splendidly for the privilege."

"There are some difficulties in the plan, it is true; our beasts might not be easy to keep within bounds. The jaguar might make an excursion into the market-town; the bear might eat a butcher. Sir Brook, besides, doubts if *feræ* could be preserved under the game laws. He has sent a case to Brewster for his opinion."

"Don't tell me of such absurdities," said Lendrick, trying to repress his quiet laugh. "I want you to speak seriously and reasonably."

"I assure you, sir, we have the whole details of this on paper, even to the cost of the beasts, and the pensions to the widows of the keepers that may be devoured. Another plan that we had, and it looked plausible enough too, was to take out a patent for a wonderful medical antidote. As Sir Brook says, there is nothing like a patent medicine to make a man rich; and by good luck



he is possessed of the materials for one. He has the secret for curing the bite of the rattlesnake. He got it from a Tuscarora Indian, who, I believe, was a sort of father-in-law to him. Three applications of this to the wound have never been known to fail."

"But we are not infested with rattlesnakes, Tom."

"That's true, sir. We thought of that, and decided that we should alter the prospectus of our Company, and we have called it 'The antidote to an evil of stupendous magnitude and daily recurrence.'

"A new method of flotation in water, by inflating the cellular membrane to produce buoyancy; a translation of the historical plays of Shakespeare into Tonga, for the interesting inhabitants of those islands; artificial rainfall, by means of the voltaic battery: these are a few of his jottings down in a little book in manuscript he has entitled 'Things to be Done.'

"His favourite project, however, is one he has revolved for years in his mind, and he is fully satisfied that it contains the germ of boundless wealth. It has been shown, he says, that in the smoke issuing from the chimneys of great smelting furnaces, particles of subtilized metal are carried away to the amount of thousands of pounds sterling: not merely is the quantity great, but the quality, as might be inferred, is of the most valuable and precious kind. To arrest and precipitate this waste is his project, and he has been for years making experiments to this end. He has at length, he believes, arrived at the long-sought-for problem, and as he possesses a lead mine in the island of Sardinia, he means that we should set out there, and at once begin operations."

Dr. Lendrick shook his head gravely as he listened; indeed, Tom's manner in detailing Sir Brook's projects was little calculated to inspire serious confidence.

"I know, father," cried he, "what you mean. I know well how wild and flighty these things appear; but if you had only heard them from him—had you but listened to his voice, and heard him speak of his own doubts and fears—how he canvasses, not merely the value of his project, but what the world will say of it, and of him—how modestly he rates himself—how free of all the cant of the discoverer he is—how simply he enters into explanations—how free to own the difficulties that bar success,—I say, if you had experienced these, I feel sure you would not escape from him without catching some of that malady of speculation which has so long beset him. Nor is one less disposed to trust him that he makes no parade of these things. Indeed, they are his deepest, most inviolable secrets. In his intercourse with the world, no one has ever heard him allude to one of these projects, and I have given him my solemn pledge not to speak of them, save to you."

"It is a reason to think better of the man, Tom, but not to put more faith in the discoveries."

"I believe I take the man and his work together; at all events, when I am along with him, and listening to him, he carries me away captive, and I am ready to embark in any enterprise he suggests. Here he comes, with two letters, I see, in his hand. Did you ever see a man less like a visionary, father? Is not every trait of his marked with thought and struggle?" This was not the way Tom's father read Fossbrooke, but there was no time to discuss the point further.

"A letter for each of you," said Sir Brook, handing them; and then taking out a cigar, he strolled down an alley, while they were engaged in reading.

"We have got a tenant at last," said Lendrick. "The Dublin house-agent has found some one who will take the place as it stands; and now, to think of my voyage."

## THE BACHELOR OF NORMANDY.

A bachelor of Normandy had one day, a little mouldy bread for his dinner. To make it go down more easily, he went to the tavern, and asked for a dernier's worth of wine. The landlord, who was a rough, ill-natured man, after having filled the measure at the cask, handed it to the gentleman with so much rudeness that he spilt half of it. To cover his rudeness, he said:

"You will become rich, Mr. Bachelor, for spilt wine is a sign of good fortune."

To fall into a passion with this brute would have been foolish; the Norman had more tact. He had yet a small coin in his purse; he gave it to the landlord for a piece of cheese to eat with his bread. The landlord took it up with an ill grace, and went to the cellar for the cheese. The bachelor then went to the wine, and taking out the stopper, let it run. When the landlord returned, and saw it running upon the floor, he hurried to the cask, and stopped it, then sprang at the gentleman, whom he seized by the collar, to bent him. The latter, being very strong and vigorous, threw the landlord upon the floor, and would have killed him, if the neighbors had not come to separate them.

The matter was carried before the king. The landlord made his complaint, and demanded damages. The king, before condemning the bachelor, wished to know what he had to answer. He related his adventure with the most exact truth, then finished by adding:

"Sir, this man told me that spilt wine brings good fortune, and that I should became rich, when he had made me lose half a measure of it. Gratitude enlarged my generosity, and to enrich him still more than myself, I spilt for him half a caskful."

All present applauded, and gathered around the Norman. The king himself laughed even to tears, and sent away the parties, saying:

"What is spilt, is spilt."

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## THE DEVIL'S HOTEL.

BY GEORGE L. AIKEN.

### I.

#### THE MYSTERY OF PARIS.

HE surprising events, which it is our office to relate, occurred in Paris in the year 1870. The Marchioness De Chateaubriand was seated in an apartment in her hotel, the windows of which overlooked the street, when her son Gaston entered, dressed for a walk. The marchioness was a widow, and Gaston her only child. On his father's death he had succeeded to his title of marquis. He was about twenty-three years of age, of good appearance and polished address. "You are going out this evening, Gaston?" inquired his

mother.

"For an hour or two only."

"And whither?"

The young marquis hesitated slightly before he replied:

"To the Tuilleries. I have given my word to some friends that I would meet them there."

"Alone, and on foot?"

"Certainly; the weather is beautiful, and the walk a trifle."

"Gaston, my son—O, be careful."

"Of what, madame?"

"Can I say?—there are unknown, mysterious perils which fill me with terror. Within the last two months, ten young gentlemen of the highest rank have suddenly and unaccountably disappeared. Can you then wonder that I tremble for you, my only son?"

Suddenly a voice from the street penetrated into the apartment—the voice of the city-crier.

"New and strange disappearance of two young noblemen—the Baron de Givroy and the Chevalier de Bohan. A reward of two thousand livres will be paid by the king to whoever shall give such information as may lead to the discovery of the murderers."

"O, horrible—horrible!" exclaimed the marchioness, as the voice died away in the distance.

"Their victims, it would seem," observed Gaston, "are chosen from amongst the most noble and the most wealthy."

"And it cannot even be conjectured how they disappear; the most active inquiries have led to no discovery."

"I cannot help believing that in all this there is a little exaggeration. That in Paris nocturnal crimes may be and are accomplished I do not doubt, and I deplore it. But for that must there be a panic amongst the ranks of our nobility? Is every young gentleman to be sealed up in his chamber, and forbidden to stir forth, lest he should encounter I know not what band of assassins? O, that would be too degrading!—besides, come what may, have I not my sword? Those gentlemen cutthroats would find me no easy prey, I promise them."

"O, yes, I know that you are brave—brave even to rashness, and it is that which makes me tremble. Be prudent, Gaston; since your poor father's death, I have but you to love; you are the only joy now left me on earth, and were you snatched away, despair would kill me."

"Fear not, dear mother, I will be prudent, and will presently return, for this evening at least, to laugh you fears away."

Embracing his mother affectionately, the young noble took his departure.

### II.

#### THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

A MAN, with a singular cast of features, marked by much apparent care and suffering, dressed in very plain attire, was ushered into the presence of the marchioness. He approached her with deep respect and reverence, carrying his hat in his hand.

"Pray pardon, madame," he said, with humility, "that your servants have permitted me to approach you."

"O, Jean, is it you?" responded the marchioness, with great cordiality. "You are welcome, and know that I am always glad to see you. Have you any good news to announce to me?"

"Alas, madame, none," answered the man, sadly. "Why is not your son with you? I have not seen him for a long time."

"He came with me, madame, and is now within your mansion. But, pardon me, marchioness, before presenting him, I would say a few words to you—to you alone. The last time I had the honor of being admitted to your presence, your ladyship made me a promise."

"I have kept that promise."

"You have written to the Lieutenant of Police," cried Jean, joyfully. "Ah! madame, my gratitude—"

"I have done better than write—I have spoken to Monsieur la Reynie."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jean, with emotion. "And he, madame—he?"

"Have courage, Jean, and hope for the best."

"Ah! madame, my prayers—"

"Enough, Jean," interrupted the marchioness, kindly. "Now call in your son."

"Instantly, madame." He paused on the threshold. "Your ladyship is aware that he knows not—"

"O, yes—fear nothing."

"Henri, Henri!" he called, through the doorway, "approach, and bow to the marchioness."

A young man, in fact, quite a lad in appearance, answered the summons. Well might his father gaze fondly upon him. He was a perfect Adonis in form and feature. Possessing almost too much beauty for a male, yet the thin lips, the quivering nostrils, and the steady light that gleamed in his blue eyes, relieved his well-cut features from all charge of effeminacy. Instead of the peruke, then so fashionable among the young men of the period, he wore his own dark brown hair, brushed back from his high, white forehead, and falling in wavy masses upon his neck and shoulders. Though dressed in the most scrupulous care, his costume was of the same dark colors and coarse texture as that worn by his father.

"Come hither, my young friend," said the marchioness, kindly.

"Madame, I—"

And he stood twirling his hat, embarrassed and timid in the presence of the great lady.

"Is he not like his poor mother, madame?" whispered Jean.

"Her perfect image." Then addressing Henri, "Do I terrify you?"

"O, no, no, madame," responded Henri, quickly.

"It is respect—timidity," said Jean. "You will excuse him, madame, at his age; our mode of life is so isolated. Henri, the marchioness is that noble, generous benefactress of whom I have so many times spoken to you."

"I well remember it."

"The tutelary angel of the village in Brittany where you were born—the protectress of our family. She was the guardian of your infancy, watched over your dying mother, and softened the bitterness of her last moments."

"During that voyage," asked Henri, "which caused you to be so long absent from your home, was it not, my father?"

Jean appeared strangely overcome by the question, and exchanged a meaning glance with the marchioness.

"During the voyage that—" he responded, with some confusion—"yes—exactly; during that long voyage."

"My father has taught me, madame," said Henri, "to pronounce your name each day in the prayers that I address to Heaven."

With these words he walked towards the window, as if to look into the street, but instead of doing so, he became absorbed in a deep reverie.

"You have acted wisely, Jean," observed the marchioness, "in guarding your son beneath your own eye, especially now when, for the young, there is such terrible danger within the city."

"True; but I fear that so retired a life has also its inconveniences."

"How?"

"For some time past I have observed in him an habitual sadness—a melancholy almost constant. Look at him even now."

"Yes. Can he have any cause for grief?"

"What grief could he have? When I have questioned him on the subject, he has answered that there was nothing needed to his happiness."

"Leave him to me, and I will interrogate him; and perhaps—"

"Ah! marchioness—the very favor I would have asked, but dared not." He called Henri to him, saying, "I am compelled to leave you here for a few moments; with the marchioness's gracious consent you will remain with her till my return; it is a favor of which you should be proud, and of which I hope that you will prove you are not unworthy."

With a respectful obeisance to the marchioness Jean left the room.

"Henri," said the marchioness, "your father fears you are concealing a secret from him."

"A secret?" echoed Henri, looking troubled.

"You are ever melancholy, he tells me, and for that sadness there must be a cause."

"To what purpose should I confess it to you, madame?—you are powerful enough you are, you could not alleviate my torments."

"You do suffer then—you confess it." Observing him, a sudden idea entered her mind. "It is, perhaps, love?"

"Madame," stammered Henri, with a blush.

"Yes, yes, I have guessed it; that is the secret of your melancholy, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Henri, with emotion, "yes, madame."

"Ah! and she that you love is—"

"A young girl, whom I first met, by accident, about a month since. The sight dazzled me, as though an angel had appeared to me, she was so chastely beautiful. She was accompanied by an elderly female—her govername, no doubt. I remained in an ecstasy, fixed to the spot where she had left me; and it was only on hearing my father's voice that I returned to myself, and with him I departed, bearing within my heart the remembrance of that celestial vision."

"Have you since beheld her?"

"O, yes, several times."

"And she has observed you?"

"Yes."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"Never!"

"Poor boy! And this woman that you love, who is she?"

"I know not."

"How! Her name—her dwelling?"

"Are unknown to me."

"And is it to such a chimera that you sacrifice your happiness and your repose? You know not even that she is free?"

"O, Heaven! what say you?"

"And should she be so, may not her birth and fortune be obstacles raised between you?"

"Alas! I have not thought of that. I have thought only that I loved her."

"Besides, at your age, you are too young for marriage. You must, therefore, my poor boy, be reasonable. Promise me that you will never again see this young girl—that you will forget her."

"Never to see her more—I can promise you that, madame; but to forget her—O, I feel that will be impossible."

"Courage and resolution, Henri; if not for yourself, for your father's sake."

"For my father—yes, you are right, madame, you are right; but, I entreat you, reveal not to him the confession I have made; he would contribute nothing towards my felicity, and he would suffer much to know I was unhappy."

"I understand you, Henri, and will be silent; but on one condition—"

"He returns—I hear his step."

Jean Decouverte re-entered the apartment.

"Now, Henri," he said. Henri bowed to the marchioness and passed by his father, who turned quickly to the marchioness, with the inquiry: "Madame, have you learned anything?"

"Yes; you have alarmed yourself without a cause—there is nothing serious."

Happy in this assurance, Jean followed his son.

### III.

#### A RENDEZVOUS D'AMOUR.

GASTON DE CHATEAUBRIAND and his friend, the Count de Sarnac, stamtered leisurely along the crowded thoroughfare.

"An adventure, you say?" questioned Jules de Sarnac.

"Yes, a delicious romance, commenced some days since, and which now approaches its denouement."

"Pray tell me all about it."

"Well, you must know that for several days I have observed, near the Tuilleries, a young girl of ravishing beauty, her eyes so lovely, and her figure so charming! Extremely reserved in her manner, this young girl way always accompanied by a respectable govername. Notwithstanding my earnest desire to make her acquaintance, I was compelled to restrict myself to tender glances; but those glances were so expressive that, as I have reason to believe, they were at last observed by my delicious charmer; only, I must confess, that they remained unanswered."

"How! not a word or look in exchange?"

"Not one. In a word, I considered the game as desperate; judge then of my surprise, my happiness, when to-day, at the moment I was about to quit the gardens, the govername mysteriously approached me, and giving me an intelligent sign, slipped into my hand a note."

"A note?"

"This note bade me be at a certain place, therein designated, at nine o'clock this evening, and informed me that a person would then meet and conduct me to my adored. You can understand my joy—my delight. But it is near the hour, and I must leave you now."

"But, Gaston, should it be a snare, a trap?"

"What nonsense! Besides, am I not armed? For an hour or two alieu."

"Good fortune attend you."

With these words the young men parted.

### IV.

#### THE DOCTOR OF THE POOR.

IN the ground floor of the old, ruinous building which, from some caprice, he had selected for his habitation, Doctor Swartzfront was bustled amongst his patients—men and women of the lower order, ragged in dress, and poverty-pinched in feature.

The doctor himself was a tall, robust man, with a sallow complexion, full black beard, and a piercing gray eye—of a somewhat sinister aspect. Rough and eccentric in his manners, and yet proving the benevolence of his disposition by innumerable acts of charity.

One by one his patients departed, with the little parcels of medicine he had made up for them, invoking Heaven's blessing on his head, until all were gone but one, a sturdy old fellow, a blacksmith, evidently, from his appearance.

"Well, why do you stay?" asked the doctor, gruffly. "Your arm is cured."

"I want to know, doctor—" hesitated the smith.

"What?"

"How much I owe you?"

"You are, then, rich?"

"No, indeed; but I—"

"Well, then, keep your money—you owe me nothing, except gratitude. I am the doctor of the poor."

"You are an angel, doctor," cried the man, with bluntness; "an angel who has tumbled down into the devil's lodgings."

"The devil's lodgings! What do you mean?"

"Why, that this house, which you now inhabit, joins, at its back, an hotel, long since abandoned and almost in ruins, and whose cellars extend as far as the banks of the river."

"It may be so, though I was not aware of it. But what has that to do with—"

"Why, it appears that, formerly, terrible crimes were committed in this hotel—awful crimes—so that, for want of a purchaser, it has long remained empty, and it is believed by many that every night sorcerers and demons have a grand gala in the old building, and from that it has acquired the name of the DEVIL'S HOTEL."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the doctor, shrugging his shoulders, "old women's stories! But the sort of neighborhood matters little to me. With a tranquil conscience we can sleep anywhere. Good-day, my worthy fellow—go, and keep your money."

"As I said before, doctor, you are an angel."

With a rude attempt at a bow the honest smith withdrew, passing at the door two females, who entered the house hurriedly, and, apparently, in a state of alarm. The honest artisan could not refrain from pausing a moment to gaze at one of them—a girl of some eighteen summers—her face was so radiant in beauty. An angry "go" from the doctor hastened his steps, and he closed the door after him.

"You appear agitated! What does it mean?" demanded the doctor, anxiously, of a woman of forty, who was the girl's companion. "What has happened?"

"We have been followed!" cried the young girl, quickly, ere her companion could speak.

"By whom?"

"Merely a young man," replied the other, "who—"

"Dame Marguerite! I have cautioned you to avoid that."

There was an angry gleam in the doctor's eye as he spoke.

"Certainly, but it was not my fault; he would not leave us."

"What was he like?"—the doctor asked this question of Berthe, the girl—"this young man?"

"I do not know," she answered, simply; "I did not even look at him."

"A ridiculous fellow, evidently in his Sunday attire," said Marguerite; "same provincial lout who has come to Paris to waste the savings of his farm." She glanced out at the window. "Ah! he is here—is approaching the door."

"Such audacity!" growled the doctor. "Go to your room—I will receive him."

The women withdrew, and the doctor answered the summons at the door, finding there the person who had been described by Marguerite. What kind of a reception he received from the doctor will appear hereafter.

## Y.

### THE WILL OF HEAVEN.

AN hour afterwards the doctor summoned Berthe to him. He motioned her to a seat beside the table which contained his drugs and instruments. At this moment Dame Marguerite bustled into the apartment.

"Well," she cried, "that troublesome fellow?"

"O, he is gone," responded the doctor, "and I promise you he will not return. Berthe," he continued, turning to her, "avoid with care everything which might give rise to another pursuit similar to that of the impertinent fellow whom I have, but now, got rid of."

"Can I hinder people looking at me?" answered Berthe. "I know not if I am pretty, but certainly I am no coquette. And yet, at the gardens of the Tuileries, whither you each day send me, with Dame Marguerite, all eyes are fixed upon me. How can I prevent that? except, indeed, I never quit the house, and to that I am perfectly willing."

"I have no objection you should be admired," observed the doctor, kindly; "but I would not have you followed—that they should ask your name, your dwelling."

"That has never before occurred," said Marguerite.

"And will not, I hope, occur again," returned the doctor, sharply. "You hear, Marguerite?"

"I am not deaf," she responded, sulkily.

"Far from following me," remarked Berthe, "those young gentlemen who, at the Tuileries, have seemed at first to pay attention to me, have, one after the other, disappeared, and I no longer see one of them."

"Nothing more simple," said the doctor. "At the end of a few days they have discovered how useless was their pursuit."

"They were driven to flight," added Marguerite, "by your modest air and freezing look."

"And yet, Marguerite, you have spoken to them."

"I?" responded Marguerite, somewhat disconcerted.

"Yes. Sometimes, as we were leaving, I have seen you approach them."

"Can this be true?" questioned the doctor, severely.

"I do not say to the contrary; it was to tell them they would lose their time."

"Good!" exclaimed the doctor, as satisfied.

"Berthe, though you are not my child, and I am only your guardian, yet have I the right to direct your conduct and to decide your future fate; do not, therefore, lightly, and without my consent, dispose of your heart." Berthe appeared strangely agitated at these words. "What ails you? You are troubled."

"I? O no, I assure you."

The doctor, not half satisfied, would have questioned her further, but was interrupted by a sudden tumult and noise without. They ran to the window.

"It is he!" cried Berthe, with a cry of despair.

"A young man has been knocked down in the streets," said Marguerite, "and they are bringing him in here."

"Well, let him come!" answered the doctor, roughly. Henri, senseless and pale, was brought in by some working men, and placed upon a couch.

"This poor young fellow has been knocked down by a carriage," said one of the men.

"He is not dead, is he?" asked Berthe, anxiously.

"No, no, he has but fainted," returned the doctor.

"Stand aside, all of you, he needs air; and you, Marguerite, take hence my ward."

"Could we not be useful to you?" asked Berthe, eagerly. She seemed to have a great repugnance to leaving the sufferer.

"Go, I say!" shouted the doctor, gruffly.

Berthe and Marguerite withdrew to their respective chambers, and the working men went into the street. The doctor examined the patient so unexpectedly brought to him.

"Pest!" he muttered. "These plagues are the fruit of a good reputation. But let us see what is the matter with this lad. Umph! no fracture—not the slightest wound—a few contusions at most. A simple cordial will restore him to himself. I will prepare it in the laboratory."

He went into an inner chamber. Scarcely had the door closed behind him, than Berthe stole gently from her chamber and approached the couch of the injured youth. At that very moment he moved, restlessly, opened his eyes, and saw her face hanging over him.

"What do I behold?" murmured Henri. "Is this a dream—an illusion!—you—you here—beside me! Where then am I?"

"This house is that of my guardian, Doctor Swartzfront, and you were brought hither in consequence of an accident that—"

"Ah! I remember; and I bless that accident, for it has brought me to your presence, and I can now say to you—"

"Not so loud—not so loud—silence!"

"O, listen to me. I cannot live without you! I have but one desire—one ambition—to devote to you my life, for I love you—I love you!"

"Pray, silence; if you are heard—"

"O, tell me that your heart is not insensible to my adoration—but say that I may hope."

"I—I dare not; my guardian is so stern, if he but knew—heavens! he is here; farewell!"

She fled to her chamber like a startled hare. Doctor Swartzfront returned with the cordial in his hand. He found Henri sitting up on the couch, gazing around him with a bewildered air.

"So you have recovered your senses," said the doctor, "and will not need the cordial I have been preparing." He placed the glass upon the table. "So much the better. How did the accident occur?"

"I was with my father, and we were crossing the street, suddenly we were separated; hurrying to seek him, I heard cries behind me; then, frightened for my father, I became confused; a carriage was dashing on—I had not time to avoid it, and was overthrown by the shock."

There was a summons at the door, and when the doctor answered it Henri heard his father's voice inquiring for him. He sprang from the couch to be warmly pressed to the breast of Jean Decouverte.

"Henri, Henri!" cried his father, fervently; "Heaven be praised, you are safe and sound, and the anguish I have endured is now forgotten! How shall I thank you, doctor, for your care? You will, I hope, believe in my profound gratitude!"

"I have done nothing for your son, sir, therefore—"

At this moment the eyes of these two men—both eccentrics in their way—met, and a vague remembrance flitted through the mind of each.

"Will you pardon me, sir, one question?" asked Jean, respectfully.

"What is it?" asked the doctor, in his blunt way.

"Have you always practised medicine?"

"I commenced my studies at sixteen years of age. Why do you ask?"

"Because, the more I look at, the longer I listen to you, the stronger becomes my conviction that you have formerly met."

"Unless you have travelled in Germany?"

"In Germany? No."

"Then you cannot know me; I am a German, was born at Heilberg, and for the first time came to France but three months since."

"In that case some fancied resemblance has deceived me."

"Probably."

"For the present we will take our leave. Come, Henri."

Henri cast a longing look behind him, but the fair face he was so anxious to see did not meet his vision. The moment they were out of the house the doctor summoned one of his apprentices—a stalwart fellow—and led him to the window, pointing out Jean to him.

"Bloe," he said, "follow that man—learn who he is." Bloe nodded his huge head intelligently, and dived into the street.

"O, MEMORY of the past!—a rock which I roll and which crushes me! O, surely twelve years of resignation, of worthy conduct, should have expiated a past, degraded by an infamous condemnation. By my zeal and devotion have I not merited the pardon I so constantly solicit? O, if I were but free!"

Thus soliloquized Jean, as he paced the floor of his little study. The old woman who performed the functions of a servant for his small domicile brought him a letter. Jean opened it, and read as follows:

"Doctor Swartzfront—real name Jacques Fromage. Born at Bourges, on the 8th of February, 1615; entered the hospital as a pupil in 1663, and, for a robbery, was soon after condemned for five years to the galleys. When his sentence had expired, he came to Paris, where, for another robbery, he was again arrested. Having escaped from prison, he went abroad. Three months since he returned to France, under the name of Doctor Swartzfront, and established himself in Paris, with a servant and a young girl, supposed to be his ward. Since his arrival, there is nothing against him; his life is regular, and he has a good reputation for skill and humanity."

"He has, perhaps, reformed," mused Jean, as he refolded the letter, and put it carefully away. He then called for his hat and cane.

Henri heard him, and came from his room.

"Are you going out, father?" he asked.

"Yes; but I shall not be long absent. I have the hope that soon these occasions for my frequent absence will entirely cease. Ah! if I obeyed my will only, my greatest happiness, dear boy, would be never to quit your side."

"If you obeyed your will, dear father? You depend then on some one? That is strange. I have always thought that men of your age were masters of their own actions."

"You were mistaken," answered Jean, sadly; "for even the most wealthy and the most powerful cannot say that they are independent. Rest easy, Henri; I shall not be long."

He departed, leaving Henri in a singular train of thought. What could be the meaning of these outgoings? He knew nothing of his father's position or fortune; nor would he have been concerned to know, did not his future happiness depend upon them. Who could aid him to pierce this mystery?—who would tell him the secret of his destiny?

His reflections were disturbed by the entrance of the servant, who announced a visitor.

"He wants your father," said the servant; "but as he is out, he said you would do."

The visitor was ushered in, a foppish young man, with a freckled face and pink eyes, extravagantly dressed.

"Well, young man," he began, without ceremony, "since you are, as that very polite old lady has just assured me, your father's son, I may tell you my business. I am the Chevalier Alexandre Jolivet of Concaineau. I have a tolerable estate." Go to Concaineau, and everybody will talk to you about me."

"Spare me the journey, sir," observed Henri, with a smile. "I can believe your word."

"Young man, Paris is a gulf!" cried the chevalier, breaking out suddenly and wrathfully, "A gulf—a vortex—an abyss! I have been but a few days in Paris, and have been robbed already of my purse, a pair of ruffles of the very finest lace, and two watches. Well, young man, I have applied to Monsieur de la Reynie, the Lieutenant of Police; I could not see him, because he was absent, but to his principal domestic I related my adventures and my griefs, and was by him referred to Monsieur Decouverte."

"To my father!" exclaimed Henri, in surprise.

"What can my father do in this matter?"

"What can he do?—everything, young man; he can furnish the necessary information, and cause to be restored to me the precious objects whose loss I now deplore. I have been informed thoroughly of his history; he has known, knows still, nearly all the sharps and thieves in Paris."

"My father?"

"Well, yes, considering he was himself a condemned criminal."

Henri uttered a cry of horror; as he did so, he heard a smothered groan, and turning he beheld his father standing in the doorway. Entering unperceived, Jean Decouverte had overheard the last words of the chevalier.

"Enough, sir," he said, advancing.

"Monsieur Decouverte?" questioned the chevalier.

"Father," cried Henri, impetuously, "tell this gentleman he is deceived, that he has calumniated you."

"I!" exclaimed the astonished chevalier. "How do you mean?"

"He has spoken only the truth," answered Jean, quite prostrated.

Henri buried his face in his hands and sank into a chair. Jean turned at once to the chevalier, feeling the irksomeness of his presence at such a moment, to question and dismiss him as speedily as possible. He had the old story to tell; fascinated by a pretty face in the gardens of the Tuileries, he had followed it, been enticed into a house and robbed. Gladly with the promise that a search should be made for his lost property, the chevalier withdrew. Jean was alone with his son.

"You know all!" he began, sorrowfully. "The secret which for twelve years I have been able to conceal from you, chance has now revealed."

"You, father—you a condemned criminal!"

"Listen, Henri, and judge me: Fifteen years since I inhabited Brittany, and cultivated a farm on the domains of the Marchioness de Chateaubriand. I had a lovely wife, whom I adored, and Heaven, to complete our joy, gave us a son—you, Henri, were born. Alas! our happiness was too great, and would not last. Calamity fell upon us, sudden and crushing as the tempest, and like it, leaving behind it only ruins. A wealthy libertine of the neighborhood beheld your mother, saw that she was beautiful, and believing he was conferring great honor on a peasant's wife, dared to declare his passion for her. He sought your mother, one evening, when she was alone within our cottage. He tempted her with gold, which she indignantly cast at his feet. Then, losing all self-control, without pity for her tears, with no respect for the cradle wherein slept her child, this miserable wretch dared to offer violence. At that moment I returned from my labors of the day. I heard your mother's shrieks, and listening only to my rage, I made a weapon of the heavy iron-bound stick which I was carrying. One blow upon his head, and the coward, who would have dishonored us, fell dead at my feet!"

"It was well done, my father," exclaimed Henri, proudly; "it was well done!"

"My crime was, perhaps, excusable; but I was charged with having drawn my victim into a snare, and with having assassinated, in order that I might rob him. Vainly I protested against the horrible accusation—vainly did your mother strive to make the truth prevail. The dead body—the gold scattered upon the floor of our dwelling—these were appearances all against me, and I was condemned for twenty years to the galleys. For my wife and child's sake, it was necessary I should live and suffer, or I should have died with shame and despair. It was during my absence that the marchioness, that good and pious lady, watched over you and your poor mother, endeavoring to sustain her sinking courage, but, alas! I never saw her more; slowly and by degrees she sank, consumed by grief and agony—and, for the second time, you were an orphan. Three years rolled over, and then, thanks to my irreproachable conduct, and, above all, to the unceasing solicitude of our good patroness, I was allowed to cast aside the infamous livery which I had worn. Monsieur le Reynie deigned to interest himself on my behalf—caused me to come to Paris, and obtained for me a humble employment. With gratitude I accepted the favor, for I should again see you, Henri—should be ever by your side, to watch over and protect you; and now that I have told you of my past life—of its heavy woes—say, Henri, do you blush for—do you despise your father?"

"Despise?" cried Henri, reproachfully; "ah, I already loved you deeply for the care and tenderness you have lavished on me; more shall I love you now, because you have so terribly suffered." And he cast himself upon his father's breast.

## VII.

### ABRAHAM AND ISAAC.

A DRY cough disturbed their fraternal embrace. Looking up, they beheld a tall, stern-looking man, standing in the doorway.

"Monsieur la Reynie here?" cried Jean, in surprise; "this honor."

"Send away your son," said the Lieutenant of Police, briefly.

Henri bowed, and retired to his own chamber.

"Decouverte," began La Reynie, "the free pardon to which you attach so much importance, depends upon yourself."

"What say you, sir?"

"These sudden and mysterious disappearances of our young nobility—have you never questioned yourself as to their authors?"

"Yes—and believe I have divined a portion of the truth. I think that, by the aid of a woman, they entice their victims into some secret den, and then plunder and destroy them."

"Ah, yes—it must be so. But this woman—who is she? That you must discover—must deliver to me her accomplices."

"I cannot promise that."

"And why not?"

"Because, to arrive at that result, it would be necessary to avail myself of a means which I cannot—dare not employ."

"Think that it is a question of the remission of the remainder of your punishment—in a word, of your free pardon."

"That pardon would be very precious; and it is not worth the sacrifice it would cost me."

The marchioness came into the room like one distracted.

"Jean—Jean!" she cried, "my son—he has disappeared—is lost. O, have pity on my despair!"

"Explain, madame?" questioned La Reynie.

"He left his home for an appointed meeting with—his friend, De Sarnac tells me—a lady—a young girl of marvellous beauty," she sobbed, incoherently.

"It is as I suspected," exclaimed Jean. "The name and dwelling of that woman?"

"Nothing do we know of either. Know only that for several days he had encountered her in the gardens of the Tuileries."

"The Tuileries!" echoed Jean.

"It is there, then," said La Reynie, "that we shall find her—it is there her perilous nets are spread."

"Yes," responded Jean, after a moment's reflection; "but, supposing that she still repairs thither, in order to arrest her accomplices, to acquire full proof of their crime, it would be necessary to cast to them a new victim, and who would be willing thus

to risk the life. Who thus would give himself a sacrifice?"

"I will!" said Henri, emerging from his chamber—the door being ajar, he had heard all. "Father, I will obtain your coveted pardon. Lady, if still he live, I will restore to you your son—if dead, I will avenge him!"

All were overcome by this noble heroism.

"Brave Henri!" cried Jean, embracing him. "Madame, that which I refused to obtain my pardon, I will do to repay the benefits which I have received from you. You watched beside my dying wife, you have protected my son, and now I devote him to you. Go, Henri, go. Heaven will guard you—Heaven will inspire me, that I may save you!"

And so, like another Abraham, he devoted his firstborn—his Isaac—to the sacrifice.

## VIII.

### THE GARDENS OF THE TUILERIES.

On a rustic seat Dame Marguerite pursued her knitting, whilst Berthe held a book in her hand; but her eyes were not upon the page—her thoughts were far away.

"He loves me!" thus she commenced with herself; "ah, how sweetly sound those words! I am not alone in the world—I am loved!"

Dame Marguerite nudged her, suddenly recalling her to herself.

"Ah, mademoiselle," she whispered, "look! Such a dashing young gentleman!"

"Well," answered Berthe, absently, "what matters it to me?"

"He has observed—is bowing to us."

Berthe raised her eyes, and uttered a cry. The handsomely-dressed cavalier was Henri.

"Ah, you know him?" asked Marguerite, suspiciously.

"I! Yes—no—that is, slightly."

Henri had timidly approached the seat, and overheard the question and answer.

"At church," he said, vainly endeavoring to control his emotion, "it has been my happiness several times to encounter this young lady."

Berthe arose, leaving her book on the seat. They strolled towards the fountain. Marguerite said nothing, but complacently pursued her knitting.

"Truly, sir," said Berthe, with charming frankness, "I could scarcely recognize you; hitherto I have seen you so simply clothed, and now this rich attire—"

How could he answer her? He could not explain to her the purpose for which he had assumed the garb of a young noble—a purpose which, as yet, had led to no result.

"I have a father," he replied, in some embarrassment, "who is indulgent to my whims—to my extravagances."

"And his name? Am I indiscreet in asking you?"

"His name?" stammered Henri. "For the present permit me to conceal it from you; ere long, perchance, I may be able to reveal it."

"Enough, sir—I respect your secret."

"But you—will you not deign to inform me—"

"I, sir, am called Berthe."

"Berthe!"

"I know not what may be my other name."

"How?"

"Alas! my whole life is a mystery. I am an orphan—am ignorant of my birthplace—a mother's kisses and caresses never have I known. In my infancy I was confided to a stranger's care—to Doctor Swartzfront; he has been my guardian—he has reared me."

"How you must love him!"

"I should do so, for, though somewhat stern—somewhat harsh, to me he has been very good; yet—yet—I reproach myself for the feeling, but I—I have always regarded him coldly—almost with aversion."

"You are not happy, then?"

"Happy! I? How could that be possible? Disinherited—deprived, from my birth, of all attachment—of all true affection—"

"Say not that, Berthe! there is a heart which loves—a heart which beats for you alone."

"You, Henri, you?" Her voice trembled with emotion. "Ah, if I might hope it—if it were possible that, one day—"

"And wherefore not? What obstacles could oppose themselves to our happiness? Are you not an orphan—mistress of your choice?"

"You forget—my guardian."

"Berthe, soon, as I hope, my destiny will be irrevocably fixed, and then—"

At this critical moment Dame Marguerite saw fit to interfere. She arose, and came between them.

"Come, Berthe," she said, "it is time to return home."

"Already?" gasped Henri.

"So soon?" echoed Berthe.

"Get your book!"

As Berthe went, slowly and sadly, to the seat, Marguerite slipped a note into Henri's hand, leaving him perfectly bewildered by the act.

"Take this, and act discreetly," she said.

"I am ready," said Berthe, returning with her book. Henri thrust the note into his pocket.

"But we shall meet again?" he eagerly exclaimed.

"Every day, and at the same hour, I come with Marguerite to these gardens."

"O! I will be here—I shall not fail. And suffer me to hope; promise me—"

"I can at least promise you that I will never be another's."

He seized her hand, joyfully, and pressed it to his lips.

"Al, dear Berthe!"

"Will you come, or not?" cried Marguerite, impatiently.

"Yes, yes. Adieu, Henri!"

"Till to-morrow, Berthe—but till to-morrow!"

He remained rooted to the spot until they were out of sight. Then, bethinking him of the note, he drew it forth. It contained these words:

"If you are anxious to behold her again whom you love, at ten o'clock this evening be near St. Germaine's Church, and you will be met and conducted to her."

A shadow fell athwart the paper. Henri looked up; his father stood beside him.

"I have seen all, hidden behind your statue," said Jean. "That woman gave you a letter?"

"Yes. O father, I am very happy! Berthe will this evening at ten o'clock expect me."

"This evening—at ten o'clock?"

"Ah, she has a true, a devoted heart!"

"How?" cried Jean, in surprise. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of her—of that young girl whom I have long loved."

"Her—you love her?"

"Forgive me that I have concealed that secret from you; but to-day only have I learned that my passion was reciprocated; to-day only have hope and joy entered into my soul."

"O Heaven! That young girl! You know not, then, who she is?"

"She is the ward of the doctor, to whose house I was taken. She is an orphan—chaste as beautiful."

"Unhappy boy! That woman whom you love—whom you are craving to behold again, is the accomplice of an infamous wretch, who was chained beside me at the galley. In a word, she is the decoy we are seeking."

Henri uttered a piercing cry, staggered, and, but for his father's arm, would have fallen to the ground.

## IX.

### IN THE SNARE.

TOGETHER, cloaked and muffled from observation, Jean and Henri proceeded to the appointed rendezvous. Jean was ill at ease; though he had taken every precaution to remove and prevent all danger, there was nothing which could calm a father's heart. Henri was in no better mood. He endeavored to summon strength and courage, to forget that his heart was suffering. She to whom he had given his entire soul, whom he believed almost an angel—what had she proved? A terrible fiend, who would treacherously lure him to his destruction!

"O!" he cried, in answer to his father's cautions, "what heed I now the dangers I must presently encounter? So I but give to justice these infamous assassins, and restore the honor of my father, I can die without a murmur of regret!"

"Die—you, Henri?" responded Jean, reproachfully.

"Ah, pardon me, my father, but I am very wretched. I so deeply loved her!"

"Banish that unworthy, that fatal passion; think only of her infamy."

"You are right, dear father, and I will cast from me the degrading weakness."

"You have your sword and pistols. You remember my instructions?"

"Yes; to fire on the first instant of danger."

"That will be our signal; we shall be near—ready—listening, and will fly to aid you."

"Do not fear, father; I will forget nothing."

"As the dreaded moment approaches near and nearer, my indecision and my fears increase. O, have I the right thus to expose you to so horrible a danger?"

"Think of the misery which has desolated our city, of the families driven to despair, of the mothers who mourn their murdered sons! We must not leave so many crimes unpunished, so many breaking hearts unsoothed, so many victims unavenged."

"Yes, you are right; it is a duty, a sacred mission that you fulfill."

By this time they had arrived in front of the Church of Saint Germaine, the bell of which was slowly tolling ten.

"Listen," said Jean, "it is the hour; and look! she comes."

He grasped Henri by the hand—a mute farewell—and glided from his side. A woman, closely muffled, bearing a lantern in her hand, approached Henri.

"Is that you, young gentleman?" questioned the voice of Marguerite.

"I am here," answered Henri.

She held the lantern up to his face, and took a good look at him.

"Yes, it is you. I recognize you. I am punctual, you see."

"So am I."

"You are waited for. Follow me."

They proceeded on their way, and, like a shadow, at their heels followed the anxious father.

## X.

### THE CELLAR OF THE DEVIL'S HOTEL.

A DREARY abode, damp, from its close proximity to the Seine, and unwholesome, having that unpleasant flavor found in old buildings long devoted to decay. There was a flight of stairs at either end, leading to the apartments above, and various doors, leading—the initiated only knew where.

Doctor Swartzfront issued from one of the doors, bearing a lantern, and a bunch of huge keys. He

was followed by his apprentice, Bloc, the stalwart ruffian who had so unmercifully plundered that simpleton, the Chevalier Jolivet.

"No one here," said the doctor, as he surveyed the gloomy cellar. "Surely Marguerite should have returned ere this."

"Where is Fourbe?" asked Bloc.

"On the watch, by my direction. Since I have learned that Jean Decouverte is protected by Monsieur le Reymie, I am far from easy. He might denounce us; and if search were made, and they should discover the secret passage which leads from my house to this hotel, we should be lost. It is settled, then, for I think it unsafe to remain here; to-morrow we depart for England."

"And the girl?"

"Berthe—my pretended ward? whom I stole from her wealthy parents, because her father sent me to the galleys! Ah! and while she has suspected nothing, I have made of her our accomplice. We will take her with us. She may still, perhaps, be useful. However, when I am dead or caught, I shall make her some amends; for I have about me always her written history. When I no longer need her, she may be restored to her parents. And now let us attend to this gentleman—whom, for two whole days, I, at your entreaty, have weakly suffered to live. We must finish him now, though."

He unlocked one of the doors, which seemed to lead to a small sub-division of the cellar, and, at his bidding, Gaston de Chateaubriand came forth.

"Well, have you reflected?" asked the doctor.

"How have you decided? Do you accept my conditions?"

"Your conditions?" returned Gaston, calmly; "a ransom, I believe?"

"You will draw a cheque on your banker for thirty thousand livres; and you will also swear, by your faith as a Christian, and your honor as a gentleman, never to reveal aught by which we might be compromised. Do this, and you are free."

"I enter into a miserable bargain with assassins," answered Gaston, disdainfully, "and so become in part an accomplice of their crimes? Absurd! I am a noble gentleman, and not a wretched, trembling coward."

"Then you refuse?"

"I do!"

"Then you shall have the death you prefer, and we will give your body to the fishes of the Seine!"

The ready knife was in his hand, but he found the huge body of Bloc suddenly interposed between him and his victim.

"You shall not kill him," said Bloc, doggedly. "Attempt it, and I strangle you." The huge arms which he extended, sufficiently proved his capacity to perform that operation. "I have told you, he and I are of the same village; I was born on his estates; and there, in Brittany, before I came to Paris and joined you in your pretty work, I was a poacher—a man must live somehow—and I was taken, and condemned to be hanged—rather a heavy price to pay for a few birds; but the marquis revoked the sentence, obtained my pardon, and, may the devil take me, if he who gave me life shall die himself, before my very eyes!"

"Would you suffer him to denounce and to destroy us?"

"Fshaw! how could he do that? What have we to fear, since to-morrow we depart? We shall be in another kingdom, before he will have found his way from the Devil's Hotel."

"Hark!" cried the doctor, with a start; some one approached. "Put him back in his cellar, until we decide upon his fate."

Bloc respectfully opened the door; Gaston passed in, and the doctor locked it securely after him. Then they both noiselessly disappeared up the further steps leading from the cellar. Almost at the same instant, Marguerite appeared at the head of the opposite flight, leading Henri, who had a handkerchief tied over his eyes. They descended into the cellar.

"We have arrived," said Marguerite; "you may now remove the bandage."

"Whither have you brought me?" asked Henri, as he did so.

He gazed around—he was in a cavern of gloom, which the rays from Marguerite's lantern but faintly penetrated.

"Near to her whom you love," answered Marguerite. "Wait here; in a few moments I will return, and conduct you to the feet of your adored one."

She ascended the steps, and disappeared, leaving Henri in utter darkness. He understood all—she had gone to seek her accomplices. The net was skillfully spread; they tempted their victims with the hope of beauty—with all the joys of love—and then, having entrapped them to their den, they slaughter, that they may enrich themselves with the plunder of their dupes. Well, let them come—he was ready!

A door opened, a light gleamed in, and a white figure moved cautiously into the cellar. It was Berthe. Slowly she advanced, until the rays of the lamp she held fell upon Henri's face.

"Henri! you—you here?" she cried, with joyful surprise.

"Did you not expect me?" answered Henri, coldly.

"Did you not feel assured that I should come?"

"I? No; I did not know it. But your presence gives me courage. O, I am glad, very glad to see you?"

"You did not expect me this evening—and that appointment?"

"I do not comprehend; and for this place, till now I was ignorant even of its existence."

"How comes it, then, that you are here?"

"Yesterday I saw my guardian touch a concealed spring, and a panel of the wainscot was removed, disclosing a secret passage; this evening, finding myself alone, the wish occurred to me to explore, and learn whither that passage led; I obeyed what I then thought was but an idle curiosity, but which now, I cannot doubt, was in reality the secret instinct of my heart."

"Your heart," exclaimed Henri; "you speak of your heart! O, horrible perfidy! I have learned the truth—know the snare that has been set for me, and for ten others, who have already been caught and murdered, which you, wretched creature, have yourself prepared! You, to whom Heaven has given an angel's beauty with a demon's heart—you, whose every look—whose every smile, cause blood and tears to flow! Infamous wretch! leave me—leave me!"

"Ah, what then have I done?" cried Berthe, overwhelmed by this fierce denunciation. "Of what do you accuse me? You have spoken to me of snares—of murders done; you are menaced, then, by some deadly peril—and you suspect me? Great Heaven!"

"Spare yourself all useless falsehood—I should not believe you."

"O, my brain wanders! How convince you? Where find words which would penetrate your heart? Henri, have pity—listen to me! I know not of what dangers, of what crimes you speak; but, whatever they may be, I am innocent!"

"Ah, if I might believe it, I would give my life, my heart's blood!"

"Henri, I swear to you that I am innocent—that I love you!"

"Berthe," cried Henri, torn by contending emotions, "yes, I do—I do believe you; falsehood could not speak with such accents—treachery could not look out from such eyes!"

"Ah!" responded Berthe, with delight, "I am prepared now to die! Let this danger come; together we will meet it!"

"No, no, not you; you must, you shall live! Fly! I must not—my place is here; duty bids me stay, and stir I will not!"

She grasped him by the arm with frantic eagerness, and endeavored to drag him to the door by which she had entered.

"O, for my sake!" she cried; "let us not delay—come, come!"

But it was already too late; Doctor Swartzfront, and his two confederates, whom he called his two apprentices, suddenly appeared, blocking up every avenue of escape.

"Berthe here!" exclaimed the doctor, greatly surprised. "Wretched girl, you have discovered our secret—you, too, must die! Upon them!"

The bright steel of their daggers gleamed in the flickering light as they advanced. With a scream of despair, Berthe sank lifeless at Henri's feet. But the youth remained undaunted; he had not forgotten his father's instructions. He drew forth his pistols, and fired each in quick succession. The cellar was enveloped in smoke; the crash of open doors answered the echoing reports of the pistols. There came the rush of many footsteps, the blinding glare of torches flashing through the canopy of smoke, a confused struggle mingled with cries and curses, and then Henri was clasped to a manly breast, and he heard his father's voice exclaim:

"Thank God, my boy—we came in time to save you!"

Doctor Swartzfront and his accomplices were brought to trial, and, thanks to the evidence of Jean and Henri, received the full sentence of the law. Gaston was restored to his mother, a wiser man for that adventure.

The papers found upon Doctor Swartzfront led to the discovery of Berthe's parents, and Henri had the felicity of placing her within their arms, only to be yielded up to him again three months after, they gladly giving their consent to his union with their daughter, as the king, in consideration of his great services in destroying this nest of assassins, gave a free pardon to Jean Decouverte, and made him a baron of the realm.

From Chambers's Journal.

## THE LIGHT-HOUSE ON THE SKEVE MHOIL.

### CHAPTER I.

It was the 6th of September, some thirty years ago, and Jamie Gurlock's birthday. Jamie was a flaxen-haired, apple-cheeked lad, six summers old, with strong sturdy limbs, and a spirit like his father's, fearless and bold. He was in great glee this afternoon, having been allowed a half-holiday from school in honour of the day; besides which, there was to be a splendid currant-cake for tea; and, better than all, 'Mam' Gurlock was engaged in putting the finishing-touches to a new coat, bright-blue as to colour, and with beautiful gilt buttons, in which he was to be arrayed after tea, and go with his mother to the light-house, and surprise his father with an unexpected visit.

So, when tea was over, and the cake duly discussed, Jamie, having had his face and hands well scrubbed, was inducted into his new coat, with strict injunctions to sit still till his mother should be ready to start—a command which Jamie's restless proclivities made it impossible for him to obey to the letter. Then Mam Gurlock packed up a little basket to take to her husband, containing a dozen new-laid eggs, a loaf of fresh home-made bread, a piece of the birth-day cake, and, on the top of all, a bunch of homely flowers, culled from the little garden in front of the cottage; then the fire was carefully raked, the cottage door locked, the key being deposited in a little nook under the thatch; and Mam Gurlock and Jamie took their way, hand in hand, up from the hollow in which the cottage was built, over the short turf of the cliffs for a quarter of a mile, and then down by a zigzag path to the sandy beach, where they found Miles Gurlock's own little boat, the *Seamew*, moored high and dry, just above the highest fringe of seaweed which the ebbing tide had washed. The boat was quickly run down to the water, and Jamie and the basket of eggs placed carefully in the stern; after which, Mam Gurlock took her seat, and pushed out boldly from shore, showing by the way she handled the oars that she thoroughly understood their use; and as soon as she got into deep water, began to pull steadily in a straight line for the light-house, two miles away, which stood out stern and gray from the flauing wrack of clouds in the western sky.

A tall comely young woman of six or eight and twenty, with a fresh frank face, and dark sunny eyes, was Mam Gurlock.

The daughter of a fisherman, and the wife of a light-house keeper, she was thoroughly at home on the water, and never looked to greater advantage than when engaged as she was at present. She had rolled the sleeves of her lilac dress high up her white and shapely arms, and had thrown off her bonnet, and let down the coils of her dark hair, that she might have the full benefit of the cool evening breeze; and as her well-rounded figure swayed gracefully to the motion of the oars, she looked like what she was—a picture of fresh, healthy womanhood—home-spun, I grant you, but of thoroughly good material.

Jamie was quite at home on the Skeve Mhoil, having been there several times with one or the other of his parents; not so frequently, however, but that each of his visits was set down as a day of high festival in the calendar of his childish recollections. He was beginning already to find that certain penalties are attached to the wearing of fine clothes; one of them, and not the least painful, being that your freedom of action is thereby narrowed, for whereas, when Jamie had gone out on previous occasions with his father or mother in the boat, he had derived intense enjoyment from dangling one or both arms in the cool clear water, this pleasure was denied him to-day, as incompatible with the grandeur of his appearance, besides which, his mother's frequent injunctions to him to sit still became intolerably irksome after a time and almost induced him to wish that he had left his gay finery at home, and had gone to see his father in his old well-patched coat, in which he was allowed to do as he liked. Jamie might not be sure as to all the other points of the compass, but he knew which was the north: it lay right through that bank of black cloud, beyond which lay Greenland and the country of whales and icebergs, where, in winter, the sun was not seen for many weeks; and his uncle Harry was out there in a big ship, fishing—yes, fishing for whales; and when he, Jamie, grew up, he also would go and fish for whales—it was the only fit work for men to do. Before long, he fell to thinking how foolish he had been to refuse that extra bit of cake at teatime, although he felt at the time that he had had enough; but certainly it would be very pleasant to munch it out there in the boat. This thought was just passing through his head, when, wonderful to relate, Mam rested on her oars for a moment, and diving deep with one hand into that wonderful pocket of hers, drew therefrom, carefully folded in a fragment of newspaper, the identical piece of cake to which

Jamie's recollections had clung, and handed it to him with a smile. How delicious it tasted, eaten out there under such circumstances, far sweeter than all that had gone before!

Mam Gurlock turning to look while she was yet half a mile away from the Skeve Mhoil, could see her husband standing out on the rock to receive her; for Miles Gurlock had not forgotten that it was his boy's birthday, and had watched mother and son through his glass from the moment the tiny speck of a boat had caught his eye when it was first putting out from land. His sunburnt face broadened into a glad smile of welcome, as he secured the little craft, and, lifting out Jamie, gave him a kiss, and a rough hearty hug, not forgetting a word of praise for the pretty blue coat.

'We've brought thee a lump of cake, dad, and it's ever so good,' said Jamie; 'and some eggs, and a posy that smells as if all the garden was squeezed up together.'

'I'm right glad thou's come, Mam,' said Miles; giving his wife's hand a warm gripe of welcome. 'I was just longing to have my little *Seamew* here, when I saw thee putting out from shore.'

'Nothing wrong, dad, is there?' said Mam, turning anxious eyes on her husband.

'There is something wrong, my lass, but nothing that need frighten thee,' answered stalwart Miles. 'Old Martin was taken with a fit about an hour and a half since, and though he soon came out of it again, it has left him very weak and poorly like; so I'm going to take him ashore, and see him safe to his sister's house in Warrendale; and now that my own boat's here, I'll e'en go in that, and then I shall get back in half the time it would take me if I went in that great awkward coble of ours, which is one of the nastiest boats to pull that ever I was in in my life.'

'And what's to become of me and Jamie while thou's gone?' said Mam.

'Thou talks as if I was going to be a month away, when I shall be back in three hours at the furthest. Thou must just make up thy mind to spend a night on th' Skeve, and help Abel Rushton to look after the lamps; for since he met with his accident t'other week, he's not been up to much, and hasn't rightly got the use of his arm yet; besides, thou knows what a timersome chap he is at the best of times, and he'd give anything rather than be left alone on the old rock when it's getting dusk. Thou can put Jamie into my berth when it's his bedtime, and I'll pull both of you ashore early in the

morning; and now I'll go and fetch old Martin down to the boat.'

The arrangement was one with which Mam Gurlock was only half satisfied; but she did not incline to oppose her husband's wishes in the matter. She would have preferred going ashore at once with him and Martin; only the *Seamew* was hardly calculated to carry more than two people, especially as the wind was beginning to freshen; and she knew how strongly her husband disliked rowing the boat belonging to the light-house, which lay moored ready for use at a moment's notice, and which would have held her and Jamie and the two men comfortably. But Mam Gurlock was not a woman given to repining; so with one little sigh of regret that her 'outing' had not been productive of quite so much pleasure as she had anticipated, she made up her mind to make the best of circumstances as they were.

Very cadaverous and ill looked Martin Gilbert, the head-keeper, as he followed Miles Gurlock down the rocks to the boat: a middle-aged man with grizzled hair, that fell to his shoulders, and with aquiline features that looked almost as keen and hard as if they had been carved out of wood. He greeted Mam with a friendly nod as he passed her, and, encountering Jamie next moment, stopped to hunt in his pockets, and, after some searching, produced therefrom a penny, which that shy young gentleman was not persuaded without difficulty to accept; but having once taken it, was desirous of proceeding home without delay, that it might be at once exchanged for sweet-stuff at a certain well-known shop in the village.

Another hug of the youngster, a cheery 'good-bye, old lass' to Mam, and Miles Gurlock stepped after Martin into the boat; a shove with the oar sent her out into deep water, and then, under the long steady strokes of Miles, the *Seamew* sped swiftly on her way.

The sun was just dipping to the horizon as the two men left the Skeve Mhoil, and westward the tips of the waves were all touched with gold and rose colour; but in the north, the low black bank of cloud still hung threateningly, like a dark mountain that had come up suddenly from the sea; and the tide, as it ran swiftly out, began to wash and beat and eddy more fiercely, under the influence of the freshening breeze, against the ledges and sunken reefs of the rock on which the gray light-house was built. The trio who were left behind stood watching the receding boat till it showed like a speck

in the distance. Jamie, as soon as he got over his disappointment at not being taken ashore with his father, made up his mind that it would be very pleasant to spend a night on the Skeve Mhoil. He had manufactured a tiny fleet of paper-boats, whose evolutions he watched with unceasing interest as they were tossed to and fro on the mimic waves of a little pool left by the receding tide among the rocks.

The evening grew at once dull and chilly as soon as the sun was lost below the line of the horizon. 'Hadt'n't thou and the lad better come up stairs, mistress?' said Abel Rushton. 'We shall do no good standing here, I reckon; and it's high time I set about lighting the lamps.'

Mam Gurlock gave a ready assent to the proposition; and after another last look, the three went up the steep copper ladder that led from the base of the light-house to the little square doorway high up in its side, through which admission was gained to the interior — Abel first, then Jamie, and Mam last of all; Jamie being beguiled, by a promise that he should see the lamps lighted, into leaving his little fleet to take care of itself. A few minutes later, the light from the great lantern shone out clear, brilliant, and steady, far over the fast-darkening sea. The dangerous reef of rocks known as the Skeve Mhoil was situated, as already stated, about two miles from the shore, or rather that ledge of it was on which the light-house was built, being the only point that remained uncovered at high water; and the spring-tides would sometimes cover even that; at other times, a strong westerly gale would often drive the waves right over it, and dash them, white and furious, against the granite pediment of the tower, and send them hissing with rage high up its smooth walls, while it seemed to look down in grim contempt at their puny efforts to displace it. But in ordinary weather, you might walk at high water twenty yards in any direction from the base of the light-house, without wetting the sole of your boot. It was at low water that the hideous features of the Skeve Mhoil intruded themselves most prominently on your notice; you were then able to understand what a cruel monster it must have been in former days, how many a gallant ship must have gone to pieces against its iron sides, before it was seized and turned into a slave, and made to carry a lamp to light up its own deformity. For half a mile or more, it stretched its arms in different directions into the sea, and at low water you could see the waves breaking whitely over them wherever they came at

all near the surface; but when the tide was in, there was nothing to betray what lay lurking below, all the more dangerous because it was unseen. Such dangers might now, however, be considered among the things of the past, thanks to the bright constant star which shone nightly high over the black volcanic forehead of the Skeve Mhoil.

To gain access to the light-house, you had to climb a fixed copper ladder, for some twenty or thirty feet, which brought you to a low-browed doorway in the thick wall, entering through which, you found yourself in a room, much more spacious, probably, than you had been led to expect. This lower apartment was used chiefly as a workshop and store-room; in the middle of the floor was a square wooden trap-door, which, on being pulled up by means of an iron ring, disclosed to view an extensive aperture, in which the provisions and better class of stores were usually kept. From this room an iron staircase conducted you to the one next above it, which was fitted up with some degree of comfort, and was dining-room, sitting-room, and bedroom in one, the beds being three narrow berths, like those on board ship, raised one above the other against the wall, and shut in by neat dimity curtains. Everything, in fact, not only in this room, which the men called their parlour, but throughout the building, was characterized by cleanliness the most exquisite. A second iron staircase led from the parlour to the lamp-room, the highest point of the light-house, outside which ran a narrow gallery, whence, in clear weather, there was a magnificent view.

Mam Gurlock and Abel Rushton sat in the little parlour together, one on each side the table, with an oil-lamp burning betwixt them; the former employing herself, while waiting for her husband, in the mending of one of his old coats, for Mam always carried a housewife in her pocket; while Abel was doing his best to spell out a well-thumbed collection of country-side ballads, leaving off now and then to vary the monotony of his occupation with a few attempts at conversation. It had been quite dark for some time past, and Miles Gurlock in the *Scamew* might be back at any moment. Jamie, contrary to his usual custom, had put in no protest this evening against being put to bed, the temptation of sleeping in his father's berth proving stronger than his desire to keep his mother and Abel company; not, indeed, that he meant to go to sleep when put into the berth — far from it; his secret



intention being to enjoy the novelty of the position, and at the same time remain a silent but wakeful spectator of all that went forward in the little room. Then, as a preliminary experiment, he drew the dimity curtains close, and shut himself in from the view of those outside. His father, he thought, no doubt did the same when he came to bed, and then he would lay his head on that nice soft pillow, and draw the bed-clothes well about him, and then—ah, well, the next thing his father would do would be to go to sleep; but he, Jamie, was not going to do that just at present; no, he was going to keep awake ever—such—a—long—time. And as he breathed these words to himself, Jamie slipped unconsciously into the sweet untroubled sleep of childhood, and knew nothing more.

'I will send thee some ointment for thy shoulder by the first boat,' said Mam Gurlock to Abel, 'and thou must get Miles to rub it in for thee. It is made from a recipe of my mother's, and is reckoned very good for anything of that kind.'

'Ay, ay, mistress, I'll try it, if so be as thou recommends it; but if I don't get better soon, I must just go and see owd Dr. Sampson.'

'It's time the *Seamew* was back, I'm thinking,' said Mam. 'Thou might just step outside, and look out for her; thou would see her in the moonlight a good way off.'

'Miles has mappen had to stay a while with th' owd chap,' remarked Abel; 'thou's no occasion to get anxious about him.'

'Nay, I'm not exactly anxious,' said Mam; 'only it's time he was back again.'

Abel Rushton put down his book, rose, stretched himself, yawned, and then went slowly down the staircase in obedience to Mam's request. A minute or two later, his voice was heard calling from below: 'I can just make out the boat, but she won't be here for ten minutes yet.'

Mam's grave face relaxed into a smile, and her needle shot more quickly through her work. She wanted to finish the coat before her husband got back, but she had still five minutes' work to do when she heard voices below, too far off for her to recognize the tones. Then she heard the noise of footsteps ascending outside, which came presently into the lower room; and then, after a pause, began to mount the iron staircase that led into the room in which she was now sitting. 'The footsteps of two men, those of Miles and Abel,' she said to herself, without turning her head to look, for she was just putting in the last stitches.

Did Miles think she had not heard him come up, that he stood there stock-still at the top of the staircase, thinking, perhaps, to surprise her when she should turn round? Next moment saw the last stitch put in, and with an emphatic 'There!' Mam stooped, and bit her thread in two, and then, with the coat held out at arm's-length, turned smilingly to confront her husband.

The coat dropped from her fingers, and with a low cry of terror, she started to her feet at the sight of two strange faces, bent loweringly on her. Next moment, she recognized one of them, and all the colour died out of her face, and with one hand pressed on her heart, she shrank back a step or two, crying as she did so: 'Steve Davidson, what hast thou done with my husband?'

'By the great Fiend himself, it is Janet Gawne, and nobody else!' exclaimed the man thus addressed.

He was a man of immense size and strength, with black hair and beard, and eyes to match; with large, well-shaped features, which years of dangerous warfare against whatever was good and lawful had hardened into a set expression of mingled cruelty and suspicion; and with a certain rugged ferocity about him that was not without its attractions for less bold spirits, who were willing to recognize in Black Steve the presence of a master-mind in wrong-doing.

His companion was a little, shambling, red-haired man, who squinted horribly, and walked with a limp—a villain of a far more intellectual stamp than Black Steve, by whom, as it soon appeared, he was regarded with much respect, if not with absolute fear. Both the men were dressed in a rough, half-seafaring costume; but Mam noticed afterwards that the red-haired man's hands were white and slender as those of a woman, and that his accent and style of speaking were altogether those of a person of some education.

Black Steve, when he had in some measure recovered from his surprise at finding Mam Gurlock there, or, as he called her, Janet Gawne, such having been her maiden name, gave vent to a laugh that seemed to shake the very building, so loud and uproarious was it; while poor Mam, white and terrified, crept still further away, till the wall arrested her further progress.

'Caught in as pretty a little trap as ever I see in the whole course of my life!' exclaimed Black Steve with much gusto. 'Sit down, Mr. Cris; sit down for a moment, while I explain this little affair.'

Mr. Cris took a chair, and nodded to his friend to proceed.

'You'll perhaps hardly believe it, but I was once in love with that white-faced cat, resumed Steve. 'I've laughed to myself many a time since to think what a fool I was, but I did love her then, and no mistake; and I believe I should have won her, if that smooth-faced Miles Gurlock hadn't come between us; but from that day I was like dirt under my lady's feet, and there was never a kind word for me afterwards. On the night of Warrendale Fair, I, thinking no harm, tried to kiss her; but she up with her hand, and slapped me in the face, and told me her mind in a way that opened my eyes completely; and then up came Gurlock, and knives were out, and there would have been blood spilt, if they hadn't separated us by force. I swore to be revenged on both of them, and Black Steve always keeps his promises either for good or bad. If that girl hadn't jilted me, I should never have been what I am now; but that's neither here nor there. Seven years have gone by since that time, but it's all as fresh in my mind as if it had happened only yesterday. I swore to be revenged, and you will see whether I know how to keep my promise!' He brought his huge fist down upon the table with a bang, and emphasized what he had said by half-a-dozen terrible oaths.

The noise awoke Jamie, and next moment one of the dimity curtains was drawn on one side, and the lad's pretty dishevelled head thrust through the opening. The two men were fortunately standing with their backs to the berths, and did not see the movement; but Mam saw it, and her heart gave a great bound as the thought of her child's danger flashed for the first time across her mind. A drooping of the eyebrows over the staring wide-open eyes, an almost imperceptible movement of the head, and quick-witted Jamie took the hint intended for him; he drew back in silence, the dimity curtain dropped into its place, and the wild look of terror died in some measure out of the trembling mother's eyes. With Heaven's help, she thought she could bear whatever they might choose to inflict on her, if only—her boy might be permitted to escape unharmed.

This little by-scene had taken but a moment to enact, and Mr. Cris's shrill exclamation, which had burst out irrepressibly at the conclusion of his friend's story, was still ringing in Mam's ears at the instant that the aspiration for the child's safety was wrung from her fluttered heart.

'As pretty a little romance of unrequited

affection as I've heard for a long time,' exclaimed Mr. Cris, as soon as his laughter had subsided; 'and I'm not the one to stand in the way of your revenge, Steve, my boy, although it's a sort of thing in which I never indulge myself; it's a luxury that often turns out rather expensive in the long-run. But, first of all, let us attend to business—let us accomplish the purpose for which we came here; there will be time enough to consider this young person's case afterwards—eh?'

Black Steve gave a growl of assent, and proceeded to examine the priming of his pistols.

'Will madame oblige me by taking a seat?' resumed Mr. Cris in the blandest of tones, addressing himself to Mam, and pointing to a chair. Mam felt that she was obliged to comply, and sat down accordingly. 'Pardon the liberty I am about to take,' went on Mr. Cris; 'but the necessities of the case must be my excuse.' So speaking, he drew from his pocket some pieces of thin cord, with which he proceeded to fasten Mam dexterously and securely in her chair, so that when he had done, she could move neither hand nor foot; and any violent effort to get away must have resulted in her falling bound and helpless to the floor; Black Steve meanwhile looking on in silent admiration at his friend's handiwork. In any ordinary case of violence, Mam would probably have begged for mercy, and not have been without hope that her prayer would be granted; but when she looked from one face to the other of the two villains in whose power she was, she saw how worse than useless any such plea would be, and maintained the stubborn silence of despair.

'I am now going to put one or two interrogatives to you,' resumed Mr. Cris, as soon as he had satisfied himself that it was impossible for her to stir, 'and the more truthfully you answer me, the better it will be for your own welfare.'

'I'll answer none of thy questions, till thou or thy mate tells me what has become of my husband,' said Mam stubbornly.

'Your husband—wretch! What do I know or care about your husband?'

Black Steve whispered a word or two in his friend's ear.

'Oh, that was him, was it?' said Mr. Cris aloud. 'He has been well looked after, you may be sure,' he added, turning to Mam: 'we have not forgotten to attend to his little comforts; only it's not convenient for him to come home this evening. He desired his love to you, and begged you would not fret—no, not even if it should

so happen that you were never to see him again."

Black Steve was tickled by his friend's pleasantry, and vowed with a terrible oath that Mr. Cris was the best company in the world.

A horrible misgiving took possession of Mam's heart; these men had murdered her husband, and seized his boat, and were here for some vile purpose, of which as yet she was in ignorance. And Abel Rushton, too—what had become of him? had he shared a similar fate? As to the shape which the long-boarded vengeance of Black Steve would take with regard to herself, she could at present form no opinion; but that its end would be death in one form or another, she could hardly doubt. If rumour spoke truly, the stain of blood lay already on the soul of Steve Davidson; and that both he and his companion would hold her life cheaply, she had every reason to believe. Well, if Miles were really gone, it hardly mattered what became of her, she thought. Ah, yes; there was Jamie! for his sake she must strive hardy for her life—for his sake she must pray that Heaven's mercy might find for her some loop-hole of escape!

These bitter thoughts occupied Mam Gurlock so deeply, that she scarcely heard the question which Mr. Cris proceeded to put to her, and he was obliged to repeat it before she could fully comprehend its import.

"Where does Martin Gilbert keep his store of money?"

"I don't know," said Mam wearily, when asked for the second time.

"You lie!" said Mr. Cris fiercely. "Don't you know that, three months ago, old Gilbert had a legacy of three hundred pounds left him, and that he is such a miser, and puts so little faith in the safety of banks, that he always keeps the money by him, wherever he may be—on shore during his holiday times, and in the light-house when he is on duty? Don't you know these things, I say?"

"I know that old Martin had a bit of money left him, and that he likes to keep it somewhere near at hand; but where he hides it away, I know no more than the dead."

"We'll soon teach you to know," said Mr. Cris with an oath. But at this juncture Black Steve touched his friend on the shoulder, and with a meaning grin drew that personage's attention to a seaman's chest placed against the wall, on which the

name of Martin Gilbert was painted in large letters.

"It will be here, if anywhere," said Steve.

"Try," said Mr. Cris sententiously, as he drew a long ugly-looking knife from one of his pockets, and felt its point appreciatively with his thumb.

The chest was locked, as a matter of course; but the skilful hand of Black Steve, with the aid of a skeleton-key, soon tickled open the simple wards. The numerous layers of clothes, all methodically arranged, were tossed unceremoniously on the floor; and Steve's itching fingers, diving here and there towards the bottom of the box, brought to light before long the object of which they were in search; with a yell of triumph he drew forth a canvas bag full of sovereigns, and flung it on the table.

Mr. Cris's ugly-looking knife was put back into its sheath without delay, and the two men seated themselves at the table to count over their ill-gotten gains. While they were thus employed, the dimity curtains opened again, and Jamie's frightened face peered through. The men were so intently occupied, that Mam could without fear signal Jamie, by sundry frowns and shakings of the head that he must on no account allow himself to be seen. Jamie understood, and was seen no more.

"A hundred and ninety each—and a very pretty little haul!" exclaimed Black Steve admiringly, when the money had been divided into two heaps.

"The old fellow's legacy and savings all in a lump," remarked his friend complacently.

"No doubt of it," said Steve. "For my part, I think we can't do less than drink Mr. Martin Gilbert's health. What say you? We are not hurried for half an hour, and I daresay we shall find a drop of the right stuff somewhere about."

"Agreed. Only find something decent to drink, and I'm your man."

"Oh, I've been here before to-day, and I know where the stores are kept."

"What about *her*?" said Mr. Cris, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of his prisoner.

"Time enough to finish her little business, *curso* her! before we go," said Black Steve; and with a diabolical laugh, he descended the staircase towards the lower room, taking with him a small lantern. "A prize!—a prize!" he shouted next minute. "Come here, old fellow, and give a helping-hand."

Mr. Cris jumped up, and with a last scrutinizing glance at his prisoner, followed his friend into the lower room. Black Steve had, in fact, found a bale of rich stuffs and a keg of hollands, which the light-house keepers had picked out of an abandoned ship a few days before, and which Martin Gilbert had put temporarily away with the other stores.

Mam Gurlock was left alone. Now or never, she must make an effort for liberty and life. If they could only creep out unseen—she and Jamie—and get down to the boat before their flight was discovered! But in that little *if* lay the whole difficulty. It was a dangerous game to play, with the two men in the lower room, through which she would have to pass with Jamie in her arms; but no other plan that she could think of offered even the faintest loop-hole for escape. Both the men were armed with pistols; and even if she got clear of the rock before they discovered her flight, she could hardly hope to get out of range, and would they not attempt to shoot her down as she sat at the oars? Well, she must take her chance of that. Jamie must be laid for safety at the bottom of the boat; and, for her own part, it would be better to die either by a bullet or by drowning, than to fall again into the hands of these terrible men. To prevent pursuit, the other boat must be cut adrift.

"Hist, hist, Jamie!" called Mam in a loud whisper, and next moment the little face showed itself through the dimity curtains, looking more bewildered than frightened, for Jamie had not understood half the strange expressions he had heard; and the idea of harm happening to his mother was something so foreign to his experience, that he could hardly comprehend it.

"Don't speak, but get softly out of bed, and come hither," added Mam in a low, smothered voice. Jamie slipped out of bed with the quickness of a lamplighter.

"O Mam, what have the bad men done to thee?" he cried, forgetting his mother's caution, as he ran to her, his bare legs and feet shewing out like marble against the dark floor.

"Hush-h-h!" cried Mam with a look of terror. "Thou mustn't speak just yet; but take that knife that lies on the table, and cut this cord that holds my arms. That's it. Now, give me the knife;" and next minute the severed cords fell one by one to the ground.

Her first act was to snatch up Jamie in her arms. "God in heaven bless thee, my darling, and keep thee from all harm!"

she murmured through the yearning, passionate kisses that fell in a shower on his face and neck. The next moment she was herself again, resolute and composed. She put the lad down with a last word of caution, drew off her shoes, and stealing on tiptoe to the staircase, went down on her hands and knees, and looked through the opening.

## CHAPTER II.

THE trap-door of the store-closet was open, and tilted up on end; and in their eagerness to examine their booty more closely, Black Steve and his companion had leaped into the cavity, which, when only half-filled with stores—as was the case at present—was indeed quite large enough to hold three or four men. They had apparently opened the bale of silk, and having satisfied themselves as to its quality, were now, by the obscure light of the lantern, engaged in driving a large gimlet into the keg of hollands, as the readiest mode of getting at the contents.

As Mam Gurlock looked down upon this scene, there flashed through her brain a sudden thought, which sent the blood coursing to her heart, and turned for a moment or two, both the place and persons before her into a picture as wild, blotted, and incoherent as the dream of any lunatic. She knelt, with her hands pressed to her brow, for a space of several seconds, till the beating at her heart was somewhat stilled; then, holding up a cautionary finger to Jamie, she stole noiselessly down the staircase into the lower room, and glided forward like an ominous shadow, till her hand rested on the trap-door, and peering with white face round the edge of it, she saw that the two men were still intent on their occupation, and that her presence was unsuspected. One after the other, the two iron hooks that held the door in its upright position were silently removed, and the same instant it fell forward into its place with a terrific crash, and shut in the two men who were below. Mam Gurlock sprang forward as the door fell, and before either Black Steve or his friend could recover from their astonishment, had run home the two large bolts with which the trap, when down, was secured in its place.

Now for the boats! To run nimbly up the stair-case into the upper room; to wrap Jamie in the warm pea-jacket she had been mending for his father; to lift him in her arms, and hasten down again, and so past the trap—where the imprisoned men were

already making desperate efforts to break out—to the outer door, and then swiftly down the outside ladder; and then skirting the base of the light-house, along the rocks at a rapid pace towards the little cove in which the boats were ordinarily moored, still holding the lad pressed tightly in her arms—was for Mam Gurlock the work of a minute. She knew that she had not a moment to lose; that the old wooden trap, serviceable enough, doubtless, for ordinary purposes, would not long withstand the desperate strength of Black Steve; and she must get away from the Skeve Mhoil before the two men broke loose, otherwise she had better have remained as she was before. Down she went, swiftly but cautiously, over the slippery juts of rock, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, but picking her way with care towards the little basin in the rocks—before her, life and liberty—behind her—— But where were the boats?

Once, twice, thrice she looked around; but the boats were nowhere to be seen. The warm flush of hope that had begun to kindle round her heart was rudely quenched; her very life itself seemed frozen out of her as she looked around for the third time, and saw herself cut off from all means of escape, and for one brief instant she felt as though she were, in spirit, a second person looking down upon the bitter strait of a poor woman called Mam Gurlock, and seeing how hopeless her case was, could afford to pity her. 'Heaven help me, or I shall go mad!' murmured Mam to herself.

In agonized despair she stood for a minute or two, utterly puzzled and confounded by her inability to account for the disappearance of the boats. That Abel Rushton was nowhere to be seen, caused her no surprise, believing as she did that he had been murdered, and thrown into the sea. Still, the boats could not have been taken away except by human hands, and gone they certainly were. She set Jamie down for an instant, and then turned and hurried up the rocks, and, standing on the highest ledge, strained her eyes out over the dark waste of waters; after a little while, right in a silver track of moonlight, and not more than a quarter of a mile from the Skeve Mhoil, she plainly saw two boats, evidently lashed to each other, in the larger of which a man was seated. Looking more intently, and, as it were, with all her soul, she clearly distinguished that the smaller boat was her husband's own little *Seamew*, and the larger one that belonging to the light-house, while the man seated so quietly in the latter could be none other than Abel Rushton, whose

sprained shoulder would prevent him from using the oars. He had not been killed, then, as Mam had surmised, though how he had contrived to escape out of the clutches of Black Steve and his friend, was more than she could comprehend; but that he had now got clear away was evident, his purpose in taking both boats doubtless being, in the first place, to prevent pursuit, and, in the second, by cutting off their means of escape from the rock, to render the capture of the two men a matter of certainty. In doing this, Abel had thought of nothing except to get ashore as quickly as possible, and gather a number of trusty friends to Mam's rescue. But Abel's accident precluded him from rowing; and although the tide had turned now, and was coming in rapidly, the boats had got into a current which ran direct for the lee of the Giant's Nose, a headland some four miles away; and even supposing he should succeed in landing there—always a matter of some difficulty—three or four hours must necessarily elapse before any help could be looked for from him; and in that time, what might not happen?

Mam had no means of signaling Abel, even supposing that his fears would have allowed him to come back, which she very much doubted; his timorous, self-loving disposition not being altogether unknown to her. No—she was as utterly isolated, and cut off from all human aid, as if Abel and the boats were a thousand miles away: her last chance of life was gone. She turned, and hurried back to the spot where she had left Jamie. If the men had not yet succeeded in breaking out of the trap, she would hide him in the berth again, where happily he might remain undiscovered till help should arrive. But when she reached the light-house, with Jamie in her arms, and had set foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, she heard the crash of breaking wood in the room above, and the loud voices of the two men as they burst out of their confinement, and knew that she was too late. All her mother's soul went forth in a brief agonized cry to Heaven that her child might be saved; and then, hardly knowing whither she was going, she ran back to the landing-place, in the desperate hope that help might already be coming from the shore. Moon and stars were shining brightly, and her practised eyes swept the space of water between the light-house and the land, but no trace of life was anywhere to be seen. She crouched down on the rocks, and pressed her boy passionately to her heart. Another minute or two now would

decide their fate. The two escaped ruffians, after hunting for her within the light-house, would come down and search the rocks, and find her—find both of them. She looked with longing eyes at the great dark waves as they came rolling in, and burst in an angry shiver of spray against the rocks. Would it not be well to court an easy death in their cool liquid depths, and so save herself and her child from that far more terrible fate which now loomed so imminently before them? But all the instincts of her nature rose up in revolt at the idea of self-destruction, and she dismissed the thought almost as soon as it was conceived. No! she would fight for her life while the faintest hope remained, and when that was gone, would strive to die bravely, as the wife of Miles Gurlock ought to die.

‘I wish dad would come and take us home,’ sighed Jamie, whose fears were beginning to be lost in his desire for sleep. ‘Last time I was here, I crept into the Kelpie’s Hole, and when dad couldn’t see me, he thought I had tumbled into the sea, and rarely frightened he was.’

‘The Kelpie’s Hole! How foolish of her not to have thought of it before! Here was a hiding-place almost impossible for strangers to discover, unless they were bent specially on finding it; the very refuge for which she had been praying, recalled to her recollection by the thoughtless prattle of her child. She bent her head humbly for a moment, and a solemn feeling of gratitude pervaded her whole being. But she had no time to lose. ‘Thou must hide in the Kelpie’s Hole again to-night, Jamie, my man,’ she said; and ‘thou mustn’t speak, nor let anybody know thou’s there, nor show so much as thy nose out of it, till the two bad men have gone away, and Abel Rushton or thy dad comes back to the Skeve. Dost thou understand?’

She had been stripping off her warm woolsey petticoat as she spoke thus, in which she now proceeded to wrap Jamie, putting Miles’s heavy pea-jacket over all; and then snatching him up in her arms, she ran, as fast as her strength would allow her, to the little jutting ledge of rock under which was the entrance to the Kelpie’s Hole, an entrance only just large enough for Jamie, encumbered as he was, to wriggle through, but expanding inside into a tiny cavern, with sufficient space for a lad of his age to sit or lie without being cramped.

Mam would have liked much to say a few farewell words to the child whom she hardly expected to see again on earth, but there

was no time for her to do so. She heard the voices of the two men as they were descending the ladder to come in search of her, and she had barely time to imprint a last lingering kiss on the lad’s lips, and to see him creep quietly into his hiding-place, when a yell of triumph from Black Steve proclaimed that she was seen.

She ran with weak uncertain footsteps from the dangerous neighbourhood of the Hole, and then, pretending that her foot had slipped, and that she could go no further, she sank down on her knees on the rock, and waited with clasped hands and bowed head for what might happen next.

With many loud oaths and oburgations, Black Steve hurried after his victim as fast as his bulk would permit him, Mr. Cris bringing up the rear in a more leisurely fashion. ‘You Jezebel!’ exclaimed Black Steve, while still some distance away, ‘I’ll put an end to your vagaries at once and for ever;’ and another moment would indeed have ended all Mam’s troubles, had not Mr. Cris hastened up, and striking his friend’s arm on one side, sent the bullet intended for her to flatten itself harmlessly against a tall pinnacle of rock that rose out of the sea some hundred yards away. ‘Don’t you be in quite such a hurry, my friend,’ said Mr. Cris; ‘there will be plenty of time for that sort of thing afterwards, if you wish to amuse yourself in such an objectionable way. I want to have a little conversation with this young person.’ Black Steve growled out something below his breath, but ventured on no further opposition.

‘In the Fiend’s name, how did you contrive to get loose?’ said Mr. Cris to Mam, as he put his hands on her shoulders, and turned her face towards the moon.

‘That is for thee to find out, and not for me to tell,’ replied Mam.

‘Perhaps so; but if’—What more Mr. Cris intended to say was never known, for at that moment, Black Steve, with a loud cry, came running back from the landing-place. ‘The boats, the boats—they are both gone!’ he exclaimed.

‘Stir from this spot, and I’ll shoot you through the head!’ said Mr. Cris to Mam, as he hurried away to verify with his own eyes the startling assertion of his friend; but, as we know already, the boats were really gone, and Abel Rushton with them; the only token left of the latter being the rope that had bound him, which one of the men found on the rocks.

‘This all comes of your clumsy style of tying the fellow up,’ said Mr. Cris savagely

to his friend. 'If I had secured him myself, we should have found him where we left him.'

'How about your own handiwork, then?' retorted Steve, pointing to Mam. 'She didn't get away, did she? O no!'

'There's some devilry about the whole business that I can't make out,' said Mr. Cris. 'I could have sworn that it was impossible for that woman to stir; and yet in less than five minutes after I leave her she is free. I can't understand it at all. But, however, we have no time to bother our heads with that just now: the question is, how are we to get away from this cursed den?'

Black Steve scratched his head disconsolately, but the operation did not seem to brighten his ideas.

'Wasn't that a boat I saw lying on the other side of the rock?' said Mr. Cris, after cogitating in silence for a minute or two.

'Oh, that's one of the old light-house boats that got a hole knocked in her bottom last winter, and is laid up there to dry into matchwood, I suppose. She's no go, she isn't; she would go down with us before we got a quarter of a mile away,' said Steve.

'You just mind this she-cat, while I go and have a look at the boat,' answered Mr. Cris.

In the course of a minute or two he came hurrying back. 'All right, my hearty!' he exclaimed. 'There's nothing the matter with the old tub that I can't set to rights in a couple of hours at the furthest—at least, sufficiently to make her answer our purpose. There's wood, and tools, and a kettle of pitch in the light-house. We'll cheat those long-shore fellows yet, Steve, my boy; and live for years to come to tell of our adventures on the Skeve Mhoil.'

Black Steve fired off a double-shot volley of oaths in his satisfaction at hearing this news.

'But first of all,' added Mr. Cris, 'how are you going to dispose of this feminine piece of goods?'

'Oh, shoot her, or drown her, which you like,' replied the brutal giant; 'so long as you finish her off, it don't matter.'

'Nay, my friend, it is no business of mine whatever; it is for you to decide, and for you to execute. It seems to me, however, that the modes you suggest are both vulgar and commonplace: and if you would allow me a suggestion, I would say, why not bind her securely to this wooden stoup, and leave her there? She would hardly get away a second time, I think; besides, there is no place for her to run to.'

'Leave her there for the tide to come up and drown her, I suppose you mean?' said Steve with a slight shudder, which even his hardened nature could not repress.

'Nay, my impulsive Stephen; you have no right to assume that I meant anything of the kind. All that I said was, fasten her to that stoup. If the tide persists in coming up, as you say, why, that is no business of ours; it must do as it likes, of course, but we can't be held responsible for its actions. The tide may be going out, for anything we know or care.'

Black Steve, whose nerves had quite recovered from their momentary tremor, grinned approval of the scheme. He picked up the rope that had been used to bind Abel Rushton, and grasping Mam roughly by the shoulder, bade her get up, for she was still kneeling with bent head and clasped hands. She sprang to her feet, as though a serpent had bitten her, the moment Steve touched her shoulder. 'Are you men or monsters,' she exclaimed, turning suddenly, and facing her two tormentors, 'that you talk of torturing a poor helpless woman thus? Have you no mothers or sisters of your own, to think of whom would shame you out of so terrible a crime? If I must die, let me die quickly: you have the means at hand. What have I done to either of you, that you should condemn me to a death so horrible?'

'Look here, Janet Gawne!' exclaimed Black Steve fiercely. 'Seven years ago, I swore to be revenged on thee, and this night I'll keep my word. I've a long memory, and I never forgive injury; so don't ask mercy here, lass, because neither of us knows the meaning of the word. I've longed, times out of mind, to be revenged on thee and thy smooth-tongued husband; now that the chance has come, I'm not going to let it slip through my fingers.' And Black Steve laughed a great brutal laugh of triumph, that seemed to be echoed by a hundred mocking fiends.

Mam Gurlock uttered no further word of any kind, but passively suffered herself to be led to the 'stoup,' Mr. Cris in so far assisting his friend; after which, Black Steve proceeded to tie her to the post as securely as his skill knew how; then, after a few more mocking words, they left her to her fate, and crossed to the other side of the rocks, and at once set about their task of patching up the old boat, on which their safety now entirely depended. The stoup to which they had fastened their victim was merely a stout wooden post, fastened down to the rock with iron clamps and screws, to which the larger class of craft that some-

times visited the Skive Mhoil in calm weather might be safely moored whatever the state of the tide.

Yes, Mam Gurlock was left to her fate, and a very dreadful one it seemed, even to her brave soul, which was not daunted by trifles. The tide was rising fast; already its tiny lapping waves were washing about her feet and ankles: in less than an hour, it would cover her head. The wind had died away again with the turn of the tide, and the bank of cloud that had lain low in the north for so long a time was now creeping up the sky with dark intent, shutting out the stars one after another, and would soon obscure the moon itself. Mam Gurlock's eyes unconsciously followed the unfolding edge of cloud in its slow steady advance. The cloud was advancing, and the tide was rising; and by the time that black canopy had shut out the whole bright moonlit sky, the waters would have closed over her, and she would be reckoned no more among the living. Well now that Miles was dead, there did not seem much in life to desire. Jamie was safe, and would be well cared for and properly brought up by Miles's relations at Birchallen; still, it would have been sweet to see the lad grow up, and to watch the ripening promise of his childhood fulfil itself in summers yet unborn; but not for her might such happiness be. Then sky and ocean vanished from before her eyes, and she saw the little cottage where she and Miles had spent their happy wedded life—the little happy home which she, alas! would never enter more—with its thatched eaves, where the twittering swallows brooded; and its patch of flower-garden, sweet-scented through all the summer months—she seemed to smell it now; with the stretch of high-road in front of it that led down into Warrendale; and the footway across the moors, that brought you direct to the cliffs, with the sea beating far below: very vividly she saw them all!

How fast the tide was rising! It reached to her waist already. But a very little while now, and her life, with all its pleasures and pains, would be closed, like a book that is shut up for ever. She had read, and she had heard the minister speak of the dark river that must be passed before the shining land beyond it could be reached; was she hoping too much, she asked herself, to hope that Miles, that the husband she had loved so truly on earth, might be there to greet her, all beautiful with the light of immortality, at the moment her foot touched the golden shore? How much such a hope mitigated the darkness of that terrible hour, she herself could best have told.

What was that? She could not keep down the smothered shriek that burst from her lips. She thought herself alone with Death, and suddenly she felt the touch of something on her shoulder.

Who or what could it be? She was so fast bound, that she could not turn her head to look; but next moment Jamie's voice sounded in her ears, and it seemed to her the sweetest music she had ever heard.

"O Jamie, why didn't thou stay in thy hiding-place?" said Mam. "Hie thee back, dear, as fast as thou canst go, and don't stir out again till daylight."

"I'm frightened, Mam, to be there by myself in the dark. If the Kelpie came home and found me, what would he say? Have the bad men tied thee to the stoup, Mam? Shall I run up into the light-house, and try to find a knife again?"

"Nay, lad; the bad men would see thee, and then they would kill thee. But, O Jamie, if thou couldst but undo that knot in the rope just under my arm!"

Jamie set to work with fingers and teeth to unfasten the knot indicated by his mother, which he was able to reach without difficulty, the back of the stoup resting against a shelf of rock some three feet in height, on which the lad was now standing.

The desire of life came back strongly to Mam Gurlock with the presence of her child, and the faint hope of escape which his words suggested. What she should do next, even if she succeeded in freeing herself from the rope, she did not then pause to consider, for the water was creeping higher every minute, and there was no time to be lost. But the knot was a hard one to unpick, and seemed at one time as though it would withstand all Jamie's efforts; but after a while it began to feel looser to his fingers, and he had just said: "I shall soon have it done now, Mam," when the mother's watchful ears heard footsteps advancing over the rocks.

"Into the water, Jamie!" whispered Mam, turning sick with terror; "and don't speak or stir till I tell thee."

Jamie slipped into the water like a young otter, and crouched under the lee of the rocky ledge on which he had been standing, with nothing but his nose and chin exposed to view; while Black Steve came striding down, to see that his victim was still secure. Having felt at the rope, and satisfied himself that Mam could not possibly escape: "By the seven holy pokers, but this is the finest bit of sport I've had for many a day! How does the water feel this evening, Mistress Gurlock? Cool and pleasant, eh?"



said the ruffian, with a laugh which told at once that he was half-drunk. "Yes, you're a plucky one; but you'll look rather washed out, I reckon, at low-water to-morrow. Well, good-bye, dear—good-bye, and pleasant dreams to you!" and with another brutal laugh, Black Steve turned on his heel, and strolled back slowly over the rocks.

Mam Gurlock breathed once more. "Now, Jamie, lad, try thy hand at the rope again," she said in a low voice; and Jamie scrambled on to the rock, and shook the water carelessly from him somewhat after the fashion of a dog, and set to work again, with nimble fingers and sharp teeth, to free his darling mother. At length the task was accomplished, and for the second time that night Mam Gurlock's bonds fell from her, thanks to the aid of Jamie. Although at liberty, she was as far from safety as ever, unless she could get back unseen into the light-house; but how was that to be accomplished? The two men were hard at work patching up the old boat just on the other side of the building, within half-a-dozen yards, in fact, of the outside ladder, up which she must climb undetected, or her life would not be worth a minute's purchase. Then there was Jamie to be considered, who objected strongly to going back to the Kelpie's Hole, and in his present frame of mind Mam felt that it would be dangerous to leave him. However great the risk might be, he must keep her company this time; she could not bear to seek the security of the light-house for herself, and leave him out there exposed to so many chances of detection. They must be saved together, or they must die together.

Having wrung some of the water out of her dress, Mam, followed by Jamie, proceeded to creep cautiously on her hands and knees round the lower edge of the Skeve Mhoil, till she came to a point that was in a direct line with the entrance-ladder, and in full view of both the men, had they turned their heads to look. Peering from behind a loose fragment of rock, Mam saw the two men very intent on the speedy completion of their task, Mr. Cris hammering away with might and main, while his amiable friend held a huge lantern to light him over his work. Mam felt that she could hardly have a more favourable opportunity, since the noise of the hammering would serve to drown any that might be caused by the movements of herself or Jamie; but, at the best, it was a dangerous proceeding. Fortunately, the moon was now entirely obscured, otherwise, their

chances of escape would have been remote indeed. She had chosen this point as the most favourable for her purpose, the ground between the place where she now was and the entrance to the light-house being thickly strewn with huge boulders, which would serve to hide their advance; while in every other direction it was quite bare and exposed, except immediately at the back of the light-house, from which the safest approach might have been made; but there the rocks rose too precipitously, with sharp, serrated edges, and deep holes between, to be ventured over by any one after dark.

Inch by inch, silently and cautiously, Mam Gurlock, with Jamie by her side, but on the side furthest removed from the view of the men, emerged from the shelter of the rock, and crawled across the open space of ground to the next large stone; then, after a minute's rest, forward again to the next sheltering spot; and so from one to the other, ever nearer the desired haven. While they were still some distance from the light-house, and at the moment they were half-way between two boulders, Mam, with her eye ever on the two men, saw Black Steve put down his lantern, and turn his face directly toward the spot where they then were. Mam's hand gave Jamie a warning squeeze, and mother and son remained as immovable as though they had been cut out of stone till the danger was over. The black-haired giant yawned, scratched his head, stretched out his huge arms, and after gazing seaward for a few moments, resumed his task of lighting his companion. If his eyes rested for a moment on the recumbent figure of Mam Gurlock, it was only as they might have rested on any wave-worn boulder, indifferently, and without thought.

This danger over, Mam and Jamie crept stealthily on their way, reaching at last the foot of the light-house without discovery; then Mam, taking Jamie on her back, began the ascent of the ladder. Step by step upward, as silently as a shadow, she had reached the top in safety, and had just swung Jamie round from her shoulder, and passed him in through the little entrance-door, when Mr Cris, pausing from his work for a moment, turned to contemplate the state of the weather; and as he did so, his quick eye caught the outline of something dark moving on the ladder. 'Look to your prisoner, Steve!' he cried, and drawing a pistol from his belt, fired. The bullet whizzed past Mam Gurlock's head, but did not touch her, and before there was time to fire a second shot, she was safe within the light-house,

with the little iron door shut and bolted between herself and her enemies. She caught Jamie to her heart, and murmured a brief thanksgiving to Heaven; and then her overwrought nerves gave way, and she fell into a sort of half-swoon, from which she was aroused, after a minute or two, by a violent hammering at the iron door. It was Black Steve, furious at her escape, trying to force an entrance. She had little fear that he would effect his purpose, for she knew the stout old door would not yield readily. Still, there was a possibility that the door might give way under the assaults of the furious giant; so Mam, followed by Jamie, ascended to the room above, and taking down an old blunderbuss which hung against the wall, more for ornament than use, she proceeded to load it, to the best of her knowledge, from the bag of bullets and the powder-flax in her husband's chest, which Miles always kept there ready for an occasional fowling expedition. Thus armed, Mam Gurlock, taking Jamie by the hand went up to the lamp-room, determined, should Black Steve break in, and such dreadful occasion arrive, to sell her life as dearly as possible. She stole out into the gallery, and looked down. He was still hammering savagely at the door, but as yet to little purpose, while Mr Cris, on the rocks below, was swearing at him for a senseless fool, and vowing that they would not have time to finish the boat and get clear away, if he delayed a minute longer; but Steve was too intent on the accomplishment of his revenge to heed the entreaties of his friend.

Mam crept round to the opposite side of the gallery, and straining her eyes, without hope or expectation, over the dark waste of waters, saw — what? A large boat pulling rapidly and steadily for the Skeve Mhoil! It was only a few hundred yards away, and could be clearly seen, thanks to a momentary break in the clouds, through which the moonlight streamed full and bright. One long incredulous gaze, as though what she saw were merely the phantom of a diseased brain, and then Mam Gurlock, with a sob of heartfelt gratitude, accepted the appearance as a blessed reality. As a signal that the boat was seen, she then began to toll the large deep-mouthed bell, which was rung by the keepers in foggy weather when the lamps were invisible, and its solemn tones now boomed forth through the quiet night, instinct with dread significance to the two wretches on the rocks below.

But wary Mr. Cris had also seen what was coming, and had passed the alarm to Black Steve; and as the bell gave forth its

first stroke, the two men were pushing their boat down the slanting rocks into the sea. Another moment, and they were both pulling with desperate energy for the shore. But the boat had been badly mended, and the water began to come in rapidly, so that Mr. Cris had soon to cease from rowing, and occupy himself in bailing; while Black Steve, notwithstanding all his exertions, could make but little headway with the water-logged craft. Five minutes later, the strange boat rounded the edge of the Skeve Mhoil, on its way to the landing-place, and next moment a loud shout from its crew announced that the flight of the two men was discovered, and the boat's head was at once put round in pursuit.

Black Steve and his companion seemed for a minute or two to redouble their efforts to escape, and then, as if seeing the utter hopelessness of their case, they at once ceased rowing, and sat quietly on their oars, as though merely waiting for their pursuers to come up to yield themselves into their hands. But when the pursuing boat had got within a dozen yards of the other, Mr. Cris leaped suddenly from his seat, and fired both his pistols at the advancing foe; and then, with a wild inarticulate cry of rage and despair, he leaped headlong into the waves, and sank to rise on more. Black Steve, unlike his friend, was an excellent swimmer, and before the confusion incident on the firing of the two pistols among the crew of the boat was over, he had slipped quietly into the water, and coming up after a lengthened dive, struck out boldly for the shore. The impression among the crew of the boat was that both the men were drowned; and on finding that the light-house boat was on the point of going down, orders were at once given to pull back to the Skeve Mhoil. The boat and crew proved to be those of a revenue-cutter, which had picked up Abel Rush-ton as he was drifting helplessly past the Giant's Nose. On hearing his story, preparations had at once been made to capture the two villains, and look after the safety of Mam Gurlock and her son.

Leaving two of his crew to look after the light-house, the officer in charge of the boat carried Mam Gurlock and Jamie ashore, where a search was at once instituted for missing Miles. After several hours' search, he was found, bound hand and foot, in one of the many caves for which that part of the coast is noted. He stated that he had been set upon by Black Steve and three more men as he was returning from seeing Martin Gilbert safe home; in the scrimmage, he had received a blow on the head which had ren-

dered him insensible for some time; and on recovering his wits, had found himself tied hand and foot, and left in charge of two out of his four captors. On the landing of the revenue-cutter's boat, these men had taken the alarm, and left him.

A few days saw Miles thoroughly recovered from his injuries; but the long and severe strain on the nerves of his wife was a much more serious matter, and several months passed away before Mam Gurlock was her old joyous buoyant self again, and could bear to talk calmly over the incidents of that terrible night on the Skeve Mhoil.

The body of Black Steve was washed up a day or two afterwards, several miles down the coast. He had been caught by the current, and carried away and drowned.

The money, in the effort to obtain which Mr. Cris and his friend lost their lives, was found intact on the table of the light-house,

where they had left it while occupied with the mending of the boat; and when old Martin Gilbert died, some three years afterwards, the whole amount was left as a legacy to Mam Gurlock.

Many years have elapsed since these events took place; Miles Gurlock, a gray-headed man, is now head-keeper of the light-house on the Skeve Mhoil; while Mam is still alive and hearty, and as nice an old woman as you need wish to see. Jamie is grown up into a stalwart man, almost as big as his father was in his younger days; he is a sailor, too, although not in the Greenland trade, being, in fact, the much-esteemed captain of one of our largest ocean-steamers; it was from his own lips I heard the narrative which I have here attempted to set down, the last time I came across with him from — ah, well, never mind from where.

## THE "MINIONS OF THE MOON."

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BY GEORGE L. AIKEN.

### CHAPTER I.

At the time of which we write, lawlessness had reached a high pitch in the ancient city of Madrid. A band of young men, composed of members of the best families and headed by no less a personage, as was strongly suspected, than the heir-apparent to the throne, the Prince Don Pedro, had leagued themselves together under the title of "Minions of the Moon," for acts of violence and oppression.

The name was chosen from the fact that their lawless deeds were done in the still hours of the night. The worthy burghers had learned, from sad experience, to tremble at the name, and to the Jewish portion of the community, they became a perfect scourge. Many a rich store was plundered, many a strong box rifled, and the daring perpetrators escaped undetected to squander their plunder at the gaming table, for though strongly suspected, yet from the fact of the dark visors and cloaks they wore, identification was almost impossible.

In various encounters with the watch, they had invariably proved victors, being always well armed and prepared for resistance. None of their number had been captured. Though several had been severely wounded, they had been invariably borne off by their

comrades. If a young noble was brought to his father's house, as had often been the case, upon one of the nights when the "Minions of the Moon" had encountered the city watch, bleeding from many wounds, a duel with a comrade was the excuse for his condition.

The high station of these offenders was another cause for their immunity, the sufferers were afraid to take measures against them. Nor were strong boxes the only object of their depredations. Many a maiden's chamber had been entered at midnight and her honor ruthlessly sacrificed. Woe to the fair wife or daughter of a citizen! her beauty made her soon a victim. Many bore the dishonor in secret, hiding their shame from their neighbors, but others proclaimed the outrage and loudly called for redress. They were only laughed at for their pains.

At last an outrage more daring and high-handed than any that had preceded it, brought matters to a climax. Don Velasco de Silva, a young and valiant captain in the Spanish army, being appointed to the office of commander of the king's household guard, took up his residence in Madrid. Though of high and almost royal lineage, he possessed but little inheritance besides his sword. It may have been from this fact that he selected an old and somewhat dilapidated chateau in the

suburbs of the city he designed for his abode. He mixed little with the gay profligates of his own age who glittered about the court as gaudy as butterflies. He was grave almost to sternness, quiet and reserved in his manners, forming no intimacies, seeking no friendships. It was soon noised about among the revellers of the court, that the old chateau which De Silva inhabited, contained a treasure which he was jealously guarding from all inquisitive eyes—his sister, or a mistress (report was in doubt), a maiden of sweet seventeen, said to be of surpassing loveliness.

The court gossips found this an inexhaustible topic. Many were the attempts made to extract some information from the young captain upon the subject, but they all proved futile. De Silva received these impertinent inquiries in no amiable mood, and the nervous manner in which he twirled his long mustachios with one hand while he grasped his sword hilt with the other, foreboded a danger which the boldest had not the temerity to intrude too far upon. But the subject was discussed among themselves daily with increasing interest.

"Is she really so beautiful?" questioned Manuel De Gama, of his friend and boon companion, Sylvie De Mosena.

"Lovely as an angel—or what I have always imagined an angel to be, judging from the paintings I have seen of them," was the response.

"You have seen her then?"

"I have."

"How—might I ask?"

"Attracted by the reports of the beauty of this girl whom De Silva keeps so jealously immured, for the past week, closely muffled in my cloak for fear I might be met and recognized by that haughty don who handles his sword-hilt so readily, I have loitered about the old chateau which he inhabits, and which he keeps as carefully barred and locked as a prison. The week was nearly expired and the only discovery that I had made was that the household of De Silva consists of an old couple, evidently man and wife—and a crabbed couple I found them. I waylaid each in turn, as they came out to purchase necessities, dazzled their eyes with some broad gold pieces in the hope to gain some information, but not a word could I get from either. I was almost in despair and about to give up the undertaking, when it suddenly occurred to me that though doors and windows were barred in front, yet there must be some win-

dows in the rear of the house looking upon the garden. But how to gain access to that garden, which was protected by a high stone wall, was a question more easily asked than solved. It was of considerable extent, reaching to the river's bank. I prowled along it, seeking for some accessible place. I was fortunate enough to find one. A tree, growing within the garden, had thrust forth its branches in the course of time, displacing the crumbling stones and making a breach which a nimble foot might climb, by grasping the overhanging branches. I determined to attempt it."

"It was a bold undertaking."

"It was that, for I knew if detected by De Silva, or his old servitor, my life would not have been worth the toss of a maravedi. But danger gives a spice to all adventures. In the gloom of the evening I returned to the broken wall, glanced around to see if I was noted, and finding all quiet, clambered over and gained the garden. Long neglect had made the ornamental trees and shrubbery like a forest. There was little likelihood of discovery in the dense gloom. I moved cautiously toward the chateau, guided on my way by a single light, which gleamed like a star. Suddenly the notes of a lute, skilfully touched, fell upon my ear. I paused to listen. The prelude ended, a voice of exquisite melody took up the refrain, and warbled a Moorish love ditty with a ravishing grace."

"It was the caged beauty?"

"It was. I had paused beneath an orange tree, and there she was, scarcely an arrow flight from me, sitting upon a little balcony, which jutted out from the window, the rays of the light within streaming full upon her face. I could distinguish every feature. The fair oval face, the long, straight nose, the raven tresses, and the dark, languishing eyes, the pointed chin, and white throat and neck descending to a bust that might have served a sculptor for a model. She sang several other simple ballads with exquisite skill and taste, and, when I had feasted my eyes and ears sufficiently, I withdrew as cautiously as I had come, and made my way out of the garden, undiscovered."

"It was a bold hazard. Have you related this adventure to the prince?"

"I have."

"What said he?"

"He laughingly exclaimed, that the 'Missions of the Moon' might visit this fair maiden some dark night."

"Umph! De Silva is not the man to tamely submit—he is a noble, not a burgher."

"Pshaw! what could one man do against us."

## CHAPTER II.

DE SILVA sat with his fair sister one summer's eve, upon the little balcony which overlooked the garden, as the sun sank slowly behind the western hills.

"Do you tire of this life of loneliness and solitude, sister mine?" he asked.

"It is wearisome," answered Juliana, plaintively. "I long for the freedom of our old home. Why do you never suffer me to go abroad?"

"Simply because I dare not. You smile—you cannot comprehend either the danger or my fear. You have never breathed the atmosphere of courts, your innocence is unconscious of the foul pollution that taints the air. Your beauty would expose you to a peril which I but hint at, as I would not shock your purity with its utterance. Even here you are scarcely safe. Prying eyes have seen you, how I cannot imagine, for I know that Pablo and his wife are as true as the steel of my trusty sword. Some popinjay from the court has been buzzing around our secluded dwelling. Pablo and Theresa have both been met and questioned, offered gold—the old device—to betray their master. Every night I fear a visit from those lawless wretches the 'Minions of the Moon.' By all the saints! if I detect them in the act of invading the sanctity of my dwelling, were they the highest in the land they should not escape chastisement!"

Julina's curiosity was aroused, and De Silva was obliged to explain, which he did as delicately as possible, who these men were, and the danger he apprehended at their hands. Juliana's cheek paled as she listened to the fearful deeds, done by these wretches, which her brother recounted.

"Now, Juliana," he said, in conclusion, "you know the cause of your seclusion from the world, and why I so jealously watch over you. We are two orphans left alone and almost friendless in the world, possessing only our proud, unsullied name. You have your honor, and I my sword to guard it. I had rather see you a corpse at my feet, than know you had forfeited that brightest jewel in the crown of womanhood. Now I must say good-night and away to my duty at the palace. Remember my words and be on the alert for

danger. I have a strong suspicion that you will be visited ere long." With these words De Silva took his departure.

The shades of night drew slowly over surrounding objects. Juliana lingered upon the balcony watching the stars peep forth one by one, and singing fragments of old forgotten Moorish legends, which her nurse, Theresa, had taught her. And so the night wore slowly on. Theresa lighted the lamp in her chamber, and cautioned her against remaining too long exposed to the dews of night. The moon came forth resplendent in beauty, and Juliana saluted her with fresh minstrelsy. At length her eyelids drooped, and she felt the languor of sleep creeping slowly over her. She could maintain her vigil no longer. She arose, entered her chamber, and, in a few moments, the extinguishment of her light was a signal that she had retired to rest.

As if in answer to that signal three dark figures, closely muffled in their cloaks, stole from the shadow of the trees, into the open space illuminated by the moonbeams, and cautiously approached the balcony.

"She has sought her couch," whispered one. "Now is the time for action."

"But how to gain access to the balcony?" questioned he, who appeared to be the leader in the affair.

"I have provided for that," returned he who had first spoken. "I have here a ladder of ropes. I can cast it upon the balcony, and the hooks will grapple in the railing."

"Let us see you try it. Be careful, though, or the maiden may awake and alarm the household ere we can gain access to her chamber."

At the third trial the hooks grappled, and several strong pulls showed that the ladder was securely fastened. He who had cast it, mounted lightly to the balcony and arranged the ladder for his companions, who quickly followed. One by one they entered the chamber, a dark lantern was unclosed and its fiery eye falling full upon the face of Juliana, aroused her from her first slumber.

She started up in affright to behold three muffled figures in her chamber.

"The 'Minions of the Moon!'" she shrieked, in terror, recalling her brother's words.

"Faith! sweet one, thou hast guessed it," cried the leader of the three, and clasping her in his arms he imprinted hot kisses upon her lips, thereby stifling her efforts to call for assistance.

With frantic struggles she sought to free

herself from his embrace. Her white night-garment was rent by her efforts, and the purity of her virgin bosom exposed to the gaze of these lawless intruders. Her feeble strength availed her little against her assailants, and soon, exhausted by her own efforts, she lay panting, helpless, in his arms. No cry of alarm had been suffered to escape her lips, and now a handkerchief was bound over her mouth.

"Pity to cover such sweet lips," laughed he, who held her; "but we must have no screaming. Nay, struggle not—you cannot escape me."

"Nor you me, miscreants!" thundered De Silva, as he burst suddenly through the window into the chamber, his drawn sword in his hand.

A wild scene instantly ensued in the chamber. One of the Minions was struck down at the first onslaught by De Silva, but the others, though taken by surprise, threw away their cloaks, and drawing their swords, furiously encountered him. The lantern was extinguished and darkness reigned in the chamber. Julina's screams mingled with the clashing of sword-blades—a fearful discord.

The Minions encouraged each other with their voices, and to prevent mistakes in the dark. De Silva had the advantage being alone, and he prudently held his peace, answering each call of his antagonists with a sword thrust. He soon discovered by their voices, that the one he had stricken down upon his first entrance was on his feet again. He was contending against three men, but not a sword-blade had touched him as yet.

"Is it you, Sylvio?" he heard one say, and as the answer was promptly given, he continued, "make your way out of this, Sir Moon; we are enough for our friend, the captain."

At that moment there was a heavy fall in the chamber, simultaneously a voice cried from the balcony.

"The ladder is gone!"

"Leap then, in heaven's name!" was the answer, "Manuel is down—and I am bleeding from a dozen wounds!"

There was another fall in the chamber, and the sound of a heavy body falling upon the ground beneath the window, mingled with a cry of pain. Julina remained silent—she had fallen into a swoon at the commencement of this fearful struggle. At this moment old Pablo opened the chamber door, bearing a light in his hand, whilst old Theresa peeped tremblingly over his shoulder. Pablo beheld

De Silva leaning upon his sword. Two bodies lay upon the floor.

"Are you hurt, master?" asked Pablo, anxiously.

"A scratch or so," answered De Silva, "but nothing serious. Hold the light, that I may see who these gallants are. Ah! I thought so—Manuel De Gama and Sylvio De Moreno. They killed each other in the dark—I scarcely struck a blow. But there is another beneath the balcony too badly hurt to get away. See to your young mistress, Theresa—she is only frightened—for I was just in time. Bring the light into the garden, Pablo."

They descended to the garden, and found the third Minion there. He had broken his leg in leaping from the balcony. De Silva started back in surprise, as he beheld the pale visage of this man.

"Do you know me?" groaned the sufferer.

"I do," answered De Silva, with conflicting emotions. "Don Pedro, Prince of Spain, you have entered my dwelling this night, for as vile a purpose as ever filled the brain of man, and were I to mete out to you your just deserts I should, as I feel strongly tempted, kill you like a wounded wolf caught in the sheep-fold, but you are my prince, and the reverence of loyalty restrains my hand. You shall be kindly cared for here, until you can be removed to the palace, and I trust the lesson of to-night's adventure will make an impression on your mind."

Lessons are thrown away upon the naturally vicious. Had De Silva ended the career of "Pedro, the Cruel," then and there, history would have been spared many a dark page.

De Silva's timely arrival is easily explained. Suspecting danger, he had kept one of his soldiers on the watch over his premises, with orders to notify him of any suspicious circumstance. The bodies of the young noblemen were sent to their respective homes. It was given out that they had fallen in a duel, and no stir was made over their deaths. Don Pedro never recovered entirely from the effects of his fall, having a limping step, for which he is distinguished in history ever after. The 'Minions of the Moon' never troubled anybody after that night.

De Silva resigned his commission and took service in France (where Julina was married), and only returned to Spain, to help Henry of Franstamara pull the crown from Don Pedro's head and place it on his own. An undertaking which proved highly successful.

# WHETHER IT PAID.

BY VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"I've about made up my mind that I shall take a trip to Oil City, the last of this week," said Mr. Spencer, settling himself back in his easy chair, after dinner, the hour following that meal being usually his most complacent one, although that gentleman's humor had grown to be a sensitive index of the state of the stock board.

"Why, father, what can have put such a notion into your head?" interrogated Mrs. Spencer, who was never quite easy at suggestions of leaving home on the part of any member of the family.

"Well, the fact is, they want me to go into a new company that is just being started, and which promises to be a good thing. But I don't like to come down in a large way, unless I'm certain of the ground I stand on, and after thinking it all over, I've about concluded that the best thing is to go on and see for myself."

"Oh, pa, I wish you'd take me along with you. Do now," put in Rusha's eager voice.

"Go to Oil City! Well, I must say, Rusha, if any fancy of yours could surprise me, this last one certainly would. What in the world can attract you there?"

"Oh, I should like the new experience, and to see real, genuine human nature with the polish off. The whole thing would be full of fresh adventure and experience to me—so different from our dead level city life. It would be capital. Oh, pa, if you only will say I may go!"

"I hope your father hasn't quite lost his senses yet," interposed Mrs. Spencer, in that tone of sensible practicality which had so often dashed its cold water on Rusha's pretty enthusiasms.

"No, my daughter," said her father, in the softened voice of which his eldest child certainly had the largest benefit, and it might be that this desire to accompany him on a journey that promised so much of fatigue and discomfort, touched the father beneath the shrewd hard business man, for he treated Rusha's suggestion with neither the rebuke nor the ridicule that her mother and sister had done.

"You have no idea what you'd have to encounter on the way, and then when we go here, what would you do—sweeping round

with your fine dresses in the dirt, and grease, and mud, without so much as a side-walk in the whole town."

"I wouldn't wear fine dresses, pa. I'd put on bloomer when we got beyond civilization," added Rusha, more for talk sake than anything else, for she saw the case was hopeless.

"I've no doubt she would," added Ella, with a pantomime that said unutterable things. "Our Rusha would be just up to that very deed."

"What a mercy it is then," laughed the elder sister, on whom the pantomime had not been lost, "that you and mother are always around to keep me in the orbit of a proper young lady, else I might fly off on a tangent at any time!"

"I realize that fully," laughing too, but after all, there was more truth than jest in her remark.

Guy and Agnes brought some new forces to the badinage on Rusha, and Mr. Spencer settled himself to his paper, from which he was roused half an hour later by the entrance of Andrew and Tom.

"Any letters after I left the office, boys?"

"I looked over the last batch that came in," answered Andrew, lighting a fresh cigar. "Nothing important, except that Crawford has been taken sick and won't be up before next week."

"And just the time when he can't be spared, for I've made my plans to go day after to-morrow."

"Can't the journey wait?" inquired Andrew, puffing at his cigar.

"No, sir. I've got other irons in the fire. You'll have to take his place, Andrew, and keep books, safe, and keys, while I'm gone."

"Confounded dull for a fellow," muttered Andrew. "Keep him tied tight from morning to night at the office."

"No help for it, sir," said the young man's father, decidedly. "Besides, a little taste of hard work wouldn't hurt any of my boys, and I can't trust such responsibilities out of our own hands, now Crawford's gone."

Andrew did not demur further. He only asked—

"Going into some fresh speculations, Governor?"



Something in the name or the tone did not seem to please John Spencer. He always, in his talk, both in his family and on 'Change, pronounced himself "down" on most of the great speculating manias which have been of late like evil spirits entering into men's souls, and making their last state worse than their first.

Naturally cautious and watchful in all his financial enterprises, he had been particularly severe on the desperate risks which many of the men with whom he was thrown in business relations constantly incurred. The losses and failures never escaped him; and he was constantly holding these up to his sons in the hope that they would prove beacon lights to the young men when they should enter the field for themselves.

There had of late been a good deal of sharp discussion on these very matters betwixt the father and the eldest son. Andrew was always quoting instances against his parent of men who had made, to use his words, a "big thing out of a small pile," and affirming that "a fellow, if he only understood the ropes, could turn his hundred into thousands as easy as you could toss your hand up, sir; and what was the use of delving and slaving all your life when a little sharpness would turn a man out a snug little sum any time, so that he could lie back on his oars the rest of his days, and have smooth sailing as he went along."

Talk of this sort always irritated John Spencer to the highest degree. He denounced in the strongest possible terms all such financial operations as "gambling, fraud, and embezzlement," and insisted that nine hundred and ninety-nine speculations of the kind Andrew quoted were sure to burst up, and involve those concerned in failure and ruin; indeed, he had evinced so much excitability when this topic was discussed, that Ella, with her usual love of peace, had said to her eldest brother—

"Why can't you let pa alone on these speculations? Let him think what he pleases, and you do the same, only keep still about it, for he'll be sure to go off like a bombshell every time the subject is touched on. If folks only could learn to let disagreeable topics alone."

And it never occurred to Ella at that time, any more than to the rest of her family, that any personal interest might lie at the bottom of Andrew's advocacy of these easy methods of making money, or that when he did not talk he might act on his own views of the matter.

"I'm going to see the thing for myself before I put my hands in," replied John Spencer

to his son's question about the object of his journey to Oil City. "If the thing promises well, I may do something with it; but they needn't throw out any bait, for I shant nibble; I'm too old for that."

"Eames has just made a good thing out of his last speculation in Erie. He put up a margin—stock went up, and he just drew in a haul of fifty thousand dollars. Snug little sum that!"

"I'd like to do that thing," said Guy. "Cracky!"

"You would, would you?" turning sharply upon the boy. "And the chances would all be that you'd lose every dollar, and go to the devil yourself before you got through."

"Oh, pa—now!" interrupted Mrs. Spencer, warningly.

"It's a fact," stoutly maintained her husband. "I tell you, more young men have been driven by speculation than by any one thing in the world into all sorts of desperate crimes, and ended up at last in a felon's cell. I know all about the way these things are managed, and how easy it is to draw a young fellow in who thinks he knows more and sees farther than his betters. If one of my boys, after all I've said, should ever disregard my advice and run his neck into some haphazard speculation, he might go to ruin for all I'd see him out—that's all."

"Now, boys, take your father's advice, and keep clear of all these dangerous places, if you want to turn out well in the world," said Mrs. Spencer to her sons, in very much the same tone that she used to promise them "a stick of candy if they would be good children and not make a noise."

"But I say," continued Andrew, "all business is speculation, get to the bottom of it. It's the same thing, only one man is more cautious and shrewd than another; but it's a race for money all the same, and devil take the hindmost. Each one is trying to get ahead of his neighbor, whether it's on the sly or all above board; whether it's in a government contract, or a petroleum company, or a banking house, it's all the same thing—make the most you can out of your man, whether he happens to be one individual or the public in general."

"Is it true, pa, what Andrew says?" asked Rusha.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is—pretty much. Of course every man must look out to feather his own nest in the world—I'm not talking against that; but business is one thing and

reckless diving into all sorts of wild speculations is another. The market is full of these just now, and people are rushing in neck and heels; but there will be an awful bursting up one of these days."

"But, pa," said Rusha, at the bottom of whose thought lay always the right and wrong of any question, "that way of doing business which you speak of seems to me so utterly selfish a one. Surely Christianity, or the highest morality even, requires some regard to the interests of one's fellow-man even in business."

Andrew burst into a loud, disagreeable laugh. "Now that is too good, Rusha. A pious and moral business! Tell that to your grand-ma'am!"

Guy joined in his brother's rather poor attempt at wit.

"Yes, Rusha, you are green!" said the boy of sixteen; but he was extinguished for that time by his sister's remarking, in her most frigid tones, that doubtless his years and experience would protect her from any of the ill effects of her verdancy.

This was as unkind a cut as Guy, who on occasions affected the disagreeable smartness of boys of his age, could well have received, and was another of the lessons which all Rusha's family were so slow in learning, that, notwithstanding the amount of badinage which she would take good-naturedly, there was a point beyond which it was not safe to drive her, and when this was passed she could always turn upon the offender in a way that effectually silenced him.

That Mr. Spencer's warnings had very little effect upon his eldest son, was proved by his remarking to Tom as they went out together that the "Governor was an old foggy any way, and that he wasn't up so early in the morning but there was a thing or two in business that he didn't know yet, and that some folks had cut their eye teeth in this world besides John Spencer." All of which Tom regarded as mere braggadocio on the part of his eldest brother.

This conversation transpired about three weeks after Andrew's rupture with his mother and sister. Since that had been healed—thanks to Rusha's courage and spirit—nothing unusual had occurred on the part of the elder son and brother to awaken the anxiety of his family. Rusha, who now observed him pretty narrowly, did not feel at ease regarding the young man. Yet she could find no fresh cause to justify her solicitude. He was still absent from home much of the time, and when there

seemed absorbed and reticent, with occasional rough explosions of mirth, which it struck his sister did not have quite a natural ring about them. Sometimes, too, it seemed to her that she caught a glimpse of some half-dogged, half-desperate expression on his face, which came back and haunted her afterwards, and yet was not tangible enough to prevent her from wondering whether the whole thing was not a mere chimera of the imagination that was always troubling her.

It is true that her father grumbled away in the old fashion about Andrew's laziness and frequent absence from business; but John Spencer's fault-finding had become chronic in his family, and was accepted as a matter of course, the only result being a sort of tacit understanding betwixt all the members that "pa" must be kept in as good humor as possible, provided this did not cost too much—a party, a new bonnet, or anything of that sort, being always regarded as sufficient motive, by anybody but Rusha at least, to brave his displeasure.

During these weeks, too, the season was unusually gay, and the family much absorbed in social excitements, so that the sisters saw comparatively little of their brothers.

A feeling of deeper confidence had, however, been growing up betwixt Rusha and Tom since their return from Berry Plains. Constantly encouraged and stimulated by his sister, the young man had actually set about preparing for college, to which his father gave a willing assent; and Tom being a rich man's son, with plenty of time on his hands, and all the temptations of a great city to beguile him into indolence and pleasure-taking, deserved a great deal of credit for resisting these as well as he did.

Naturally bright and intelligent, as were all the Spencer sons and daughters, Tom had still habits of study to establish, and this was a great effort to one who had no aid from the daily regimen of school or college, but whose hours were entirely at his own disposal.

Rusha opened her sanctum to him, and if it had not been for her constant example and encouragement, Tom's ambition towards scholarship would long ago have failed him before indolence and pleasure, those two lions that lie in wait along the paths of human life and achievement. Poor Tom battled with them single-handed sometimes, but they never totally overcame him—thanks to that sister of his, to whom, though he or she might never know it, he would in a large sense owe whatsoever his

future might bear of strong, worthy, successful manhood.

Tom's awakened interest in the new world of study, the kindling of all the activities of his intellect before that vast field of knowledge which opened its mysteries and beauties before him, were all fostered by Rusha in a thousand ways. They read the same books and discussed the same themes together in the little retired sanctum, that was to her the dearest spot on earth.

And the change that was being slowly wrought in Tom Spencer did not end here, else its work would have been most partial and imperfect. It went deeper than that into his whole character, slowly but persuasively. His moral nature was quickened in a thousand ways; new questions stirred themselves in his soul; things that once never awakened a thought within him began now to seem mean and ignoble to his deepening moral susceptibilities; and little by little, and here and there, his conscience grew more sensitive, and life began with much of obscurity and vagueness to open out before him with some new, vast meanings and responsibilities.

And it was pleasant and touching in more senses than one to see the young, eager minds in some of their talks on the great questions which underlie all human life, and without which, as Paul said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Of course Rusha was leader here, and Tom followed the deeper nature, the finer conscience, and forgot for the time all the little weaknesses and absurdities that were so natural to his age and experience, and became simple and earnest. And in these brother and sister talks how much seed was dropped in the clefts and deep places of his soul, that should spring up afterwards in noble aspiration, and steadfast faith, and higher loyalty, only God and the good angels of Tom Spencer knew.

Rusha, too, was growing, without much outward help and with many drawbacks—growing so slowly that neither she nor those around her suspected it, among the constant chafings and irritations of the sensitive, finely-strung soul, across whose chords the winds of life swept, making deep voices sometimes of sweetest harmonies, but, alas! oftener of saddest discords.

The acquaintance with the Rochfords, which had opened so auspiciously, had been doomed to sudden disappointment. The doctor had gone to the war, and Angeline had accom-

panied him as hospital nurse. The house was still kept open, for Sicily, who had gone, meanwhile, to reside with some relatives in the country, came down frequently to the city, as she had some general charge of her brother's and sister's beneficiaries.

But her visits were always crowded with business, so that Rusha seldom saw her, and whatsoever wholesome influences their society might have exerted at this time on her ardent, impressive nature, was entirely lost to her, and she had to make her own way as best she might out of the mistakes and mischiefs of her early training, out of false and ignoble views of life, out of all sorts of social sophistries; and she went on blindly, "stumbling often, but never content to lie there"—went on, not seeing the hand that was leading her.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

"What in thunder does this mean?"

Adam Crawford sat before the iron safe in John Spencer's private office one morning, somewhat less than a week after that gentleman's departure for Oil City, when this expletive dropped from his lips—the strongest that any possible amazement or horror could have drawn from the man. For Adam Crawford was at that moment in a state of such blank amazement and terror as he had never experienced before in his life.

He sat there alone in Mr. Spencer's small private office, behind the desk, where the great iron safe always stood, and to which nobody ever had access except the owner and the book-keeper, unless the keys, in some unusual contingency, were placed for a short period in Andrew's charge. A set of these lay now upon the top of the chest, the heavy door was swung open, revealing the great ledgers and piles of papers on one side, while on the other was the vault, which now was uncovered, containing many thousands in gold and greenbacks.

Some small debts falling due on this morning, the book-keeper, in whom Mr. Spencer reposed absolute confidence, had opened the vault, when his eyes were arrested by the sight of several empty bags, which he had seen Mr. Spencer place there just before his departure for Oil City, remarking that he should probably use them in a new investment on his return.

Each one of the bags had contained five thousand dollars in gold. Adam Crawford lifted up one and then another of these—it was empty, and dropped away from his nerveless

hands, for the strong man was weak as a little child.

Mr. Spencer had selected his book-keeper from a host of applicants on account of his "honest face," and the man was a shrewd reader of countenances. Adam's would have borne witness for him anywhere—an honest, open, manly face, whose character compensated for its rather marked homeliness, but that could be trusted, his employer averred, to the antipodes with uncounted gold.

Andrew Spencer sat that morning at the desk, writing with somewhat unusual diligence, for, as he told one of his friends who stopped in to invite him to a ride on the Bloomingdale Road, "the old man was expected back in a day or two, and there'd be a regular blow up if he didn't put matters through before that time."

So, although he had not seen the inside of the office for two previous days, he was apparently absorbed in his work when the book-keeper came to the inside door, and spoke with white lips—

"Spencer, I say, we've been robbed!"

The voice was not loud. Andrew kept on at his writing. You could hear the rapid scratch of his pen in the stillness. It seemed strange that the voice did not reach him.

"Spencer," the key a little raised, "look here—we've been robbed!"

Andrew turned round sharply.

"What's that you say, Crawford?"

"The gold has gone in the safe vault!"

What Andrew said here, or whether he said anything at all, Adam Crawford could never recollect, although he afterwards tried to, many times. But he remembered that they both returned to the safe, and Adam pointed to the empty bags, and they two counted them over. There were four whose entire contents had been abstracted. The others lay undisturbed. Then the two young men looked at each other, face to face, eye to eye.

"There were five thousand dollars in each of those bags. I heard your father say the day that he placed them there!" said Crawford.

"Yes, here is the mark," replied Andrew, turning the side of the bag towards him. Then the young men looked at each other again, face to face, eye to eye.

"Is there anybody you suspect is at the bottom of this business, Crawford?" asked Andrew.

"Not a living soul—God is my witness, not a living soul. Do you?" watching young

Spencer's face in a kind of vague hope of some clue.

"Not one."

"But we must ferret out the wretch who has done this!"

"Yes, Crawford," said Andrew, "that is the first step—we must ferret him out;" then after a little pause, "You've had the keys about you ever since you got back?"

"Night and day; except that one that I gave them to you, when I went out of town— you remember?"

"Yes, the money was all safe then, for I came here in the morning and placed this package of greenbacks in the vault. The safe must have been broken into after that."

"But how was it done, Spencer? if we could only get on the scoundrel's track!"

And Andrew Crawford remembered afterwards how many improbabilities they started—how they discussed one person and then another, but never found a single individual or circumstance on which there was the slightest ground for basing a suspicion of the crime.

Andrew, however, maintained the opinion that some experienced burglar had watched the building, and broken into that and the safe at night; indeed, it was impossible that any but a most skilful robber could have opened the vault, whose lock, like that of the outer safe door, it seemed must have demanded any degree of ingenuity on the part of one who attempted to pick it.

Then the young men examined all the doors and window fastenings, but there was not the faintest trace of disturbance among all these. Then they came back again, and sat down before the open safe, and decided that the only thing to do, was to put the matter into the hands of some shrewd detectives, and await Mr. Spencer's return.

"But I dread to see the man's face," said Adam Crawford.

"So do I. Wont there be a storm, though?" and the book-keeper remembered that as Andrew said this, he shuddered, but that did not surprise him at the time, for he was half bewildered himself with the shock which the sudden discovery of the crime had occasioned him, and just as Andrew Spencer ceased speaking, his father walked in. Something in the faces of both the young men struck him at once.

"What has happened?" he asked, stopping short.

The son and the book-keeper each waited a

moment for the other to reply. Then Andrew spoke—

"Father, the safe has been opened, and you've been robbed of twenty thousand dollars!"

For the next week the robbery, whose consummate skill and secrecy seemed to set all discovery at defiance, was the engrossing topic in the Spencer family.

Of course it got into the papers, and a large reward was offered for the perpetrators. All the people who called talked over the details, with that relish for the secret and horrible which belong in common to our human nature. Mr. Spencer never returned home without being assailed by the feminine portion of the family with inquiries as to whether they had yet got any clue to the criminals. Indeed, betwixt their indignation and curiosity, the Spencers, especially the younger ones, could never let the subject rest, and all the circumstances connected with the robbery, which, beyond the fact itself, were of the most barren character, were discussed at every meal, as though the whole thing was entirely new to each person.

The loss of twenty thousand dollars did not in reality affect John Spencer, although one might have thought to hear the man talk, that it came very near ruining him; an insinuation that Andrew always repelled with contempt, affirming that the Governor often made more than that in a single day's operation.

Still, beyond the loss of the money, the manner of its disappearance was one that gave the prosperous broker a good many sleepless nights. He racked his brain trying to find some individual on whom he could fasten a suspicion, but the more he contemplated the matter, the more inexplicable it became.

The best detectives in the city had been on the scent a week without starting the slightest trail of the thief—it seemed impossible that any one unacquainted with the rooms could have broken into them and the safe, and left no trace of their entrance in door, or window, or lock; and during the three days in which it had been satisfactorily determined that the crime had been committed, the keys of safe and vault had been alternately in the possession of Andrew and the book-keeper.

At one time, for want of some better subject, a strong suspicion had attached to the office boy, who swept the rooms and kept the fires—a little dark, open-faced lad, whose mother was a widow, an honest, hard toiling wo-

man, driven nearly to frenzy by the suggestion that her son was concerned in the crime. But after the boy had borne the rigid examination to which he was subjected by the detectives, they both at the close acquitted him of the slightest complicity in, or knowledge of the crime.

"The fellow that got into that vault must have been a confounded sharp rascal! Beats everything hollow that I ever heard of in that line," said Mr. Spencer, as he stood one morning by the grate after breakfast, with his hat in his hand ready to start down town. "There's Thorp, now, one of the smartest hands in the city to run a thief down—I was talking with him last night, and he says he never knew a job done up quite so thoroughly as this was. How the rascal got into the office and picked that safe, just as well as I could have done it myself, locked up everything just as he found it and went off, baffles me. Thieves don't usually work in that way."

"The rogue was probably used to it," remarked Andrew, drawing on his gloves.

"But burglars don't usually take all that pains. Thorp insists that the scoundrel was thoroughly versed in the premises."

"Pa, now," said Ella, more for the sake of saying something than any real suspicion in the matter, for the whole family indulged in all sorts of chimerical fancies, and some of their absurd suggestions would have done credit to the wildest flights of a sensation novelist, "you don't really suppose Crawford could have done it, do you?"

"Nonsense!" muttered Andrew.

"No, child, no. I'd stake my life on that fellow's honesty. Why, I'd sooner believe I got up myself in a nightmare, and took the money out and dropped it in the sea. That's a comfortable way of accounting for it at last."

"I guess you must have taken it, Andrew," said Agnes, with her girlish titter, turning on her brother. "You had all the keys, you know, so it would have been very easy, and if Crawford didn't steal the money, why, of course *you* did!"

"I never thought of that," said Ella, who always was ready for a jest. "Come, now, old fellow, just own up that you did it!"

"Not just yet," answered Andrew, and he laughed out loudly. Afterwards they all remembered that laugh, though at the time nobody thought anything of it."

"I never thought much about a thief before"—it was Rusha speaking now—"but somehow I cannot help feeling a perpetual

curiosity about this one. I suppose it is because no crime ever came quite so near home to me before."

"It's come home to my pocket," interrupted her father. "Zounds, I wish I could get hold of the scoundrel!"

"And it's come home to my wardrobe, too, for ma says now you've met with such a loss, I must go without the new velvet cloak she promised me this winter. But, indignant as I am, I can't help wondering what sort of a man this thief was! Was he old and hardened in sin, or was he young, and was this his first crime, committed under some dreadful stress of temptation? Had he a pleasant home, and a father and mother, and brothers and sisters that loved and trusted him, and who have not to this day the slightest suspicion of his crime, and to whom the knowledge of it would come down with just that awful crushing blow that it would on all of us, if one of our boys had done such a thing. It's singular, but I wake up sometimes in the night, and these questions rise up and haunt me until it's hard to go to sleep again."

Rusha's speech was addressed to no one in particular, but looking up suddenly at its close, her eyes encountered Andrew's. His dropped in a moment, but not until she had seen something in them—was it remorse, or shame, or anguish—something which she unconsciously felt at the time, but did not understand until afterwards.

"That's all moonshine, Rusha," said her father, a little roughly. "The rascal doesn't deserve any pity, and won't get any if he falls into my hands—that's settled. If we can once get hold of him he's booked for the penitentiary for pretty much all the rest of his days. That's the way to serve these fellows."

"I don't dispute it, pa, only those words keep coming into my thoughts. No man liveth to himself, and it is a law of all human life that the innocent shall suffer for the guilty. It is likely that this wretch, too, has somebody that loves him—somebody to be crushed and heart-broken for his crime!" and again looking up, Rusha's eyes encountered Andrew's, and again his dropped.

"Stuff and nonsense," said her father. "The upshot of it is, if the villain's got any family, they're probably hardened cases, and leagued with him in his crimes, so all that is pity is wasted on the rascal and his relations. The only way is to put these fellows right straight through, which I shall, in this case, only let me have a chance at him. But this

won't do for me!" glancing at his watch, and starting off, followed a little later by his eldest and youngest son.

It happened that very morning, that Thorp, the detective, who had thus far been unsuccessful in getting hold of any clue to the robbery, was on Wall street, and came suddenly upon an old friend, a former chief of police, and a man who seemed to have an almost miraculous gift of tracing a crime up to its source. A long experience in the service had made him a singularly acute reader of men, and once given the smallest clue of character or circumstance, and he would follow up and uncover the most complicated and thoroughly devised plot of villainy.

Possessed of consummate self-control of countenance and manner, capable of assuming for the occasion, any character that he chose, understanding the forms of temptation which appealed strongest to the weaknesses of different classes of men, and combining all these qualities with a silent, but alert observation that seemed almost supernatural, it was not singular that the criminal seldom escaped on whose path officer Hatch was started.

The policeman had just returned from the West, where he had succeeded in unravelling a peculiarly adroit and successful piece of villainy, in the discovery of which all his predecessors had failed.

As the two detectives stood talking together on Wall street, Mr. Spencer happened to pass by, and he paused to inquire of Thorp whether he had struck any trail yet, and receiving a reply in the negative, hurried away.

The sight of the broker suggested Thorp's next remark—"That's a troublesome piece of business I've got on hand just now, and thus far it's completely baffled me; I wonder what you'd make of it, Hatch?"

"What kind of work was it?" asked the other.

"A twenty thousand dollar business. Office entered, iron safe broken open, and money abstracted, all in the neatest, completest way, sir—not a pane broken or a lock disturbed."

"And you haven't got on the scent yet?"

"Not after a week's hanging round. A singularly cute piece of work;" and the detective briefly sketched the facts of the burglary.

"Burglars don't do up business in that smooth fashion," remarked Hatch, when the other was through. "And why not help himself to the whole pile, when he had such a chance?"

"That's precisely the point I don't under-

stand. Altogether a singular affair," replied Thorp.

His companion went over rapidly in his mind the principal points of the case. "Broker absent—two sets of keys, in possession of son and book-keeper—office-boy."

"Look here, Hatch," said Thorp, as a bright idea struck him, "if you've no special business on hand, s'pose you step into the office a moment, and see if you can find an end to the rope?"

The policeman assented, and they walked into the office, where the safe was shown, and the circumstances of the robbery related again by John Spencer himself.

A few glances of Hatch, apparently careless ones, took in the book-keeper, from the hair of his head to the toe of his boot, and in these the detective had settled in his own mind that whoever had robbed that safe, Adam Crawford was not the man. The office-boy underwent the same silent interrogation, with a like result, and while the three men stood talking together by the safe, in the inner room, Andrew Spencer walked in. He nodded pleasantly to Thorpe, with whom he had frequently talked over all the details of the robbery, and after some slight business with the book-keeper, joined the men a moment, and Hatch stood quietly watching the young man while he talked in a way that would not have attracted anybody's attention, but with a keen scrutiny that took in every line and shade of expression on the young man's face.

"The thing was well done—we'll have to concede that," said Detective Thorp. "But that safe was not picked by a common house-thief, for one of that sort would have helped himself to the whole pile, and not been so careful to smooth over all his tracks. A new hand at the trade, probably."

"I took it for an old one; the thing was done so nicely," said Andrew, with a light laugh; but Detective Hatch caught something in it nobody else did. He spoke now—

"Perhaps the fellow had got into a fire, and made some speculation, or something of that sort, and wanted twenty thousand to help him out of it."

He was apparently speaking to the elder Spencer, but the whole power of his covert gaze was bent on the younger's face. He saw a light start, a little shadow of pallor there, and the whole thing lay bare to Morgan Hatch.

"Well," said Thorp to his companion, as they went out, "struck the track in there?"

"Yes."

Thorp darted a strong glance into his companion's face; but that countenance was used to reticence. "Not that book-keeper?" he said.

"No."

Then in a moment it flashed across Thorp who his companion meant. The surprise was so sudden that he stood still a moment; but as soon as he had leaped to this conclusion, the detective saw with the quick discernment of one used to these things how all the parts fitted into one another, and explained the unusual circumstances which had puzzled him whatever way he turned the crime over in his thought. "Hatch, you're a trump!" hitting his companion a smart blow on the shoulder. Then, after a moment's pause: "But to find out the motive—that's the next step, you know?"

"Clear enough," said Hatch. "This one was just the sort of material to get his neck into trouble. Rich man's son 'round town—fast—keeps horses—gets into bad company of men and women—all sorts of extravagance and dissipation—falls into debt—runs into speculation to help him out of it—promises large, but don't pay at first—goes into the gambling deeper, needs more money, and at last gets desperate—keys in his possession—easy enough to abstract the money—hopes to pay it before it's missed, and there you have the whole thing. I've had so many such cases to deal with, that I can read them like a book."

"I've dealt with scores of 'em," said Thorp, "but somehow this one threw dust in my eyes. I've got the end of the rope now—thanks to you, Hatch—and I'll follow the whole thing up; be a thunderbolt to the old man, though."

"Serves these rich men right!" said Hatch, decidedly—"ought to keep a sharp look-out for their sons, and not leave them to run into the fire."

"Well, I shall see this job through now," said Thorp. "My young gentleman little thinks what a storm is brewing for him;" and the two men parted at the corner of Broadway. Less than a week after this, Mr. Spencer met the detective on the street. "I've been expecting news from you before this time, Thorp," he said.

"The job was done up more nicely than such matters usually are," answered the wary policeman.

"The more I think of it," said the gentleman, "the more am I convinced that the party concerned was of the better sort—a gentleman

robber. But whoever he proves to be, when you get your grapples on him, fix him tight, sir."

"You don't want him treated gently on account of reputation, or previous good character, or anything of that sort?" asked Thorp, with a motive, perhaps.

"No, sir!" growing excited—"I've no weak sympathy for that kind of scoundrels. Deal with him just as the law provides, without fear or favor. If it was my own son, sir, who had been guilty of such a high-handed rascality, I should want him chucked right into the Tombs."

John Spencer turned on his heel; but the next time he saw the detective he remembered what he had said.

Of course, you must have already forestalled who was the perpetrator of the crime, and it is not necessary that I should dwell on it or on the series of evil doings which culminated at last in this sin. Alas, that it is so common a one—that the columns of our daily papers are blackened with the heading of these same, and that at the time I write this there is such an appalling activity in crime in high places; and alas for the broken hearts and blighted households upon which this horror falls, a thousand times darker than death.

The policeman, with his long experience in these matters had touched on the main points of Andrew Spencer's downward career. At each of them he had paused a moment; but he had not moral strength to withstand the flood of temptation which poured in on his weak soul, and each step he plunged farther down.

Gambling overwhelmed him with debts, and there was no way out of them except by rushing into speculations which seemed to promise an easy path out of his present straits.

Of course, he was usually made the dupe of others, and driven to desperation, he borrowed money, and put up one margin after another.

These debts became due at the time when an unusually large venture seemed to promise immense profits. He said to himself, with that weak sophistry which has beguiled so many souls to death, that he would borrow the money of his father, and he meant, or thought he did, to repay all that he had stolen. And so desperate, maddened, he played and lost.

And yet Andrew Spencer was not alone to blame in this matter. At the door of his father and his mother lay a part of the guilt, little as

either suspected it. Had not John Spencer, by his daily life and example, taught his son that the making haste to be rich—the getting and holding of money, was, after all, the great dominant object of life, instead of laying broad and deep as life itself those principles of honest integrity, uprightness, beating against which no worldly temptation shall prevail! Had not the weak mother taken for granted that which no mother has any right to do—that her son could not go very far out of the way? Had she not had the flexible soul under her moulding influences from its birth! Had she sought to make the young conscience sensitive in all directions during these formative years—the love of right, the loyalty to truth and honor deeper than life itself?

And Andrew Spencer's mother would have laid down her life for him; and yet she was "found wanting" here.

She had placed no high ideal of living before his eyes; she had not watched his besetting sins, and fortified him where he was weakest; but the paramount tendency of her teaching and example—the spirit of the household had been such as to make him regard the world, its opinions, its regards, its honors, as the greatest and best thing in life, and an occasional solemn shake of the head, and a small seasoning of "pious talk" could not counteract the effect of general example and daily life, and out of the world that she had served so faithfully for her own and her children's sake, was Mrs. Spencer to reap her reward.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



## WHICH IS WHICH?

BY ELLA RODMAN.

A VERY cheerful-looking upper room was pleasantly littered with all manner of pretty things pertaining to a lady's wardrobe; and two young girls, who were engaged in a valuable discussion of the various articles, harmonized very agreeably with the beauty around them. There were "loves of organdies" spread out on the bed, delicate lilac, and rose, and blue; "perfect" silks hanging over chair-backs, and a simple, but exquisitely beautiful bridal dress arranged in state by itself. Then there were mysterious-looking boxes, and parcels, and things for which it would be difficult to find a name, making the room look as though a dry-goods store had been suddenly emptied into it.

"There certainly is something very exhilarating in a quantity of new things all at once!" exclaimed one of the young girls, as she gazed admiringly upon the attractive paraphernalia. "It is almost enough, of itself, to induce one to get married. But, after all, Jessie," looking around critically, "while all that you have is very pretty, and in perfect taste, there is nothing costly or elegant—I do not quite understand it."

The fair bride-elect blushed, as though suspected of a misdemeanor, while she replied quickly, "You know, Emma, that papa is not rich, and Herbert is quite a poor young clergyman."

"Yes, I know all that," said the damsel, decidedly; "but I also know that uncle Bridges, who is rich, gave you a check for a thousand dollars, 'to be spent in bridal foolery,' as he complimentarily termed it. Now, in looking upon your purchases, unexceptionable as they are, I see nothing like value received for the sum in question; and I ask what has become of the thousand dollars—or, at least, of five hundred of it?"

Jessie's pretty face was in such an evident state of confusion, that her cousin suddenly exclaimed, "I see land ahead, I do believe! Jessie Ingleson, you've given the missing five hundred to that imaginary little church that Herbert is so frantic to have erected in the coal regions! You needn't deny it. I don't consider that the French Empress' appropriation of her diamond necklace for a school, or something, was anything compared to this—for diamond necklaces

were comparatively every-day affairs with her; but five hundred dollars is a sort of meteor that will scarcely cross your path once in a century!"

Jessie murmured softly, "'Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.' Please do not say any more about it, Emma; Herbert approves of what I have done, and that is sufficient for me."

"Of course," returned Emma, mischievously, "thine handmaid only desireth to do what seemeth pleasing in the eyes of my lord. But really, Jessie, I think I must reconsider my hasty promise to make you an early visit at the rectory; for I have an unpleasant vision before me of sitting down at the dinner-table, fearfully hungry, in full view of my favorite chicken-pie, all impatience and expectation, when suddenly his reverence, for whom we have waited, makes his appearance from outside, saying, in a matter-of-course tone, as he seizes the chicken-pie, 'My love, there is a poor woman at the door, with a drunken husband and six small children, who says that she has not tasted chicken-pie for a month! I am sure that, after that, you and Emma will cheerfully dine off the cold meat. I will likewise take the sweet potatoes, my love,' (another pet vice of mine,) 'as we shall find bread a very good substitute. When we give, let it be of our best.' Now, I can't help being hungry," continued the lady, piteously, "and when I am hungry, I am cross; so I am afraid I should be very uncomfortable, and make every one else uncomfortable among such good people."

"I declare, Emma, you are really too bad!" said Jessie, laughing in spite of herself at her cousin's comical expression while delivering this tirade; and I have a great mind to punish you by not allowing you to come to the rectory at all. But here," she continued, as a servant entered with a large bandbox, "is something to divert your thoughts from your anticipated troubles."

Two exquisite bonnets of white crape, trimmed with lilies of the valley, and made exactly alike, soon sent the mercurial Emma into ecstasies of admiration.

"One for each of us, dear," said Jessie, with an affectionate kiss.

"You should not have done this," was the

reply, "especially after the deficiency in your accounts; there, don't look so reproachfully at me, I promise not to mention the subject of accounts again. But do you know, you little idiot! that bridesmaids don't wear bonnets exactly like the bride? How, in the world, are people to know which is which? You must let me take out these lovely lilies, that look so pure and modest, and put in a staring pink rose, in order to notify a credulous, trusting public that I am not Mrs. Herbert Wylie."

"No, no!" exclaimed Jessie, eagerly, "promise me that you won't, Emma! You don't know," said the poor little bride, trembling all over, "how dreadful that first Sunday in our own parish seems to me. I fancy myself walking up the broad aisle with Herbert, and every one pointing and looking at me, as they whisper, 'There's the bride!' 'That is the rector's wife!' 'What do you think of her?' I know that my face will be the color of a beet, and I shall not know what I am doing. You must promise to be with me on that first Sunday, like a dear, good girl, and wear the bonnet like mine."

The "amethyst eyes," as her lover called them, were looking most beseechingly into Emma's dark orbs, who exclaimed in delight,

"What a head it is for plotting, to be sure! under those innocent-looking waves of auburn hair. Yes, my dear, I will enter, heart and hand, into your diabolical scheme; and I do devoutly hope that, as no one could possibly take us for twin-sisters, there will ensue a most delightful state of confusion."

Jessie looked rather alarmed. "Do you think it would be wrong?" she asked, timidly.

Her cousin immediately assumed a solemn expression of countenance. "I always had a great admiration," said she, "for that woman who, being reduced to selling crumpets for a living, added to herself, after calling out her wares, 'I hope to goodness no one hears me!' Now, if you feel at all uneasy respecting the deception of your admirably-arranged plan, you can pin a slip of paper on your bonnet with the words, 'I am the bride—but please don't see this.'"

Jessie's pretty under lip had something of a pout, as she exclaimed, "I really think, Emma, it is very unkind of you to tease me so; when I am going away, too!"

The wedding was over, and the wedding-trip, which had occupied a blissful month, spent in lounging through quaint, Canadian cities, and dreaming on the beautiful waters of the St. Lawrence; and Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Wylie, with Mr. Allen Wylie, and Miss Emma Raybold—

—arrived at the rectory on Saturday evening.

Poor little Jessie dreaded the Sunday ordeal so intensely, that her mischievous cousin was quite moved in her behalf; and when service-time arrived, Mrs. Wylie appeared in her gray traveling-dress and straw bonnet, trimmed with blue, and took her brother-in-law's arm, while Miss Raybold looked very lovely and bride-like, in the bonnet with lilies of the valley, and a white barege dress, with a mantle of the same, and coolly took possession of her new cousin.

Now the Rev. Herbert had gone into such lover-like ecstasies over the becomingness of Jessie's traveling costume, that he innocently supposed she wore it this morning to pay him a particular compliment; he was also ignorant that it was not the custom for unmarried girls to attire themselves in bridal white. Thinking, too, that Jessie was particularly kind to Allen as his brother, she became more lovely than ever in his eyes; and the unsuspecting man walked blindly into the snare that these two artful girls had prepared for him.

A bright color glowed in Miss Raybold's cheek, and an enthusiastic young man declared that "she was a vision of beauty," as the party advanced to the rector's pew; but a mischievous light sparkled in the downcast eyes, as she found herself the object of curious, inquiring stares, that speedily assumed an admiring character. She knew that she was pretty, although by no means unpleasantly conscious of it; and this enabled her to bear with equanimity the wrapt gaze of a young man in the adjoining pew. She rather wished that he had not gazed at her quite so frequently, however; for, in the one glance he had directed that way, she saw enough to impel her to look again—but that was impossible when she was certain of meeting his eyes. He was first her *beau-ideal*—outwardly, at least; tall, fair, and aristocratic-looking—and Miss Emma was by no means as attentive to the service as she should have been.

Mr. Wylie was comparatively a stranger in the parish, having been there but six months; and all his doings, therefore, were still a subject of interest. People were unanimous in their praises of the bride; and not a few young gentlemen sighed that so fair a vision should be appropriated. Some admired the sweet face of the quiet-looking little cousin; but it was generally agreed that she was a very pale star beside the moon-like bride.

As they returned to the rectory, Mr. Wylie, who had seemed to be looking for some one, observed: "I am quite disappointed that Frank

Beechcroft did not come up to us after service, as I supposed he would have done. I wished particularly to introduce him to you, Jessie, for he is my pet parishioner, and has been of great assistance to me. He is a very gentlemanly, intelligent fellow, too. What is the matter, Emma?"

The damsel had heaved a deep sigh. "I don't know," she replied, "unless I am in love. 'Who is that nice-looking gentleman who sat on my right, and was so very devout and attentive?'"

"The very friend of whom I was speaking!" exclaimed Mr. Wylie, with his face in a glow of enthusiasm. "I look upon Frank Beechcroft as a model man; he is superintendent of the Sunday-School; is devoted to the poor and sick in an unostentatious way; and yet he is the very incarnation of fun and frolic wherever circumstances warrant an outburst. We must have him at the rectory, Jessie, and let Emma give him some of her delicious music."

Allen Wylie was only a college-boy, rather at a loss what to do with himself, or his brother's fair guest, and far more disposed to devote himself to Jessie than to the bright and formidable Emma. The latter laughingly declared that he was too hopelessly "veal" for her to have any patience with him—and they seemed to enter into a tacit agreement to let each other alone.

The bride was not left long without callers; each one of whom was apparently more astonished than the last to find that the bride was not the bride at all, but only her cousin. This ordeal was had enough, to be sure; but Jessie felt intensely grateful that she had been spared that first Sunday appearance, for, by next Sunday, all wonder would have died out. The feminine portion of the community were now fully acquainted with the identity of Mrs. Wylie, as were also certain young gentlemen, who could scarcely conceal their joy at the discovery that the fascinating Emma was not forbidden fruit.

But Frank Beechcroft had no sisters to enlighten him, for his home was in a distant city; and on the very day after the arrival of the party at the rectory, he most unaccountably took himself off there on a visit of a week's duration. The young clergyman was considerably puzzled and disappointed; he had quite looked forward to displaying his prize to Frank, and he was the very one of all others who seemed to avoid them.

But the rectory became so transformed by the two bright presences that seemed to fill every nook and corner of it, that the master found himself afloat in such a sea of happiness,

as left him very little opportunity to trouble himself about secondary matters. Even Jessie displayed quite an elfish and mischievous propensity, incited and abetted by Emma; and with Allen's contributions from his college stores, the inmates of the rectory conducted themselves in such a manner as rather to astonish the head of the house, and gave people generally the idea that they were "having a good time."

The rectory was a very pretty, picturesque-looking place, with its vine-shaded verandah, that was very aptly designated "the summer-parlor." A young man passed slowly by, one evening, looking lingeringly through an opening in the vines, where a bewitching vision in a white dress and scarlet shawl, that contrasted brightly with the rich coils of dark hair, presented itself.

"Why, Frank!" called out Mr. Wylie, "is that you? Do come and show yourself!" and he rose to welcome the expected visitor.

But the gentleman, raising his hat respectfully to the ladies, passed quickly on, murmuring something about "business," and "great hurry!"

"I am very much afraid," said Mr. Wylie, solemnly, "that Frank is in love."

A sort of hysterical giggle proceeded from Emma's direction; but the next moment she was commenting very calmly on the stars.

The morning after, Mrs. Wylie was considerably surprised by the abrupt entrance of her cousin in a glow of excitement, and looking her very loveliest. The jaunty little hat, with its rose-colored feathers, was a most becoming contrast to the dancing eyes beneath; and the white dress, with rose-colored ribbons, was exactly like Emma, for she understood dressing herself to perfection.

"Such an adventure as I have had!" she exclaimed; "I feel so delightfully wicked!"

Then, throwing her hat on the sofa, she continued, "You must know, Jessie, that I rambled off by myself to explore that delightful piece of woods just opposite the orchard; and I was enjoying the cool, fresh greenness exceedingly, and feeling quite good and sentimental, when I heard an individual, like one of the brothers in 'Comus,' wandering near me, and repeating poetry to himself. I could not distinctly hear the words, but they referred to some 'she' of whom the speaker professed to know very little, but who had evidently made sad havoc with him generally. Animated by the spirit of mischief, and just to see what effect it would produce, I repeated the words; 'She only said, my life is dreary.' The effect was not at all what I anticipated, being nothing less

than the sudden apparition of that very good-looking Mr. Beechcroft, who glared at me so wildly that I believed I screamed, or did something foolish. You see I was reposing very comfortably on the grass, in an attitude that rendered a speedy and graceful retreat out of the question; and I was, moreover, engaged in the infantile occupation of twining butter-cups into a wreath. Had I been a queen, he could not have approached me with more deference. 'Lady,' said he, in a most fascinating voice, 'do not be alarmed, I know too well what is due Mrs. Wylie to cause you any uneasiness.' I believe I sighed, (for the life of me I could not help it, Jessie,) and it all sounded so delightfully, like what you hear about French novels, (you know we were not permitted to read them,) where the heroes and heroines are always in love with other people's wives and husbands, that I quite held my breath in wonder as to what would come next. What *did* come next was, that the individual, after a prolonged gaze, (which I saw out of the tail of my eye) suddenly stooped, and kissed my lips in the most melancholy manner imaginable, and saying, as he did so, 'Farewell forever in *this* world!' seemed to vanish into thin air. I cannot imagine, I am sure, how he could suppose that a kiss was 'due Mrs. Wylie.'"

"Oh, Emma!" exclaimed her cousin, "this is really dreadful!"

"Isn't it?" continued the heroine, gayly. "Only fancy how Herbert will storm when he hears of this interview between Mrs. Wylie and Mr. Beechcroft!"

"Why did you not tell him at once that you are not Mrs. Wylie?" asked Jessie, rather indignantly. "It would save a great deal of trouble, besides putting at ease this man, who has evidently fallen in love with you."

"Because, dear," replied her cousin, demurely, "I do so love to be engaged in a little bit of romance; and I do not think that men who fall in love with people ever should be 'put at their ease'—it just spoils them. The unattainable is always most attractive; and should Mr. Beechcroft discover that there is only a plain, commonplace 'Miss' before my name, I am afraid that his devotion would sink down to zero immediately. Only think of the fascinating enormity of his conduct: to lose his heart to the wife of his rector."

Jessie laughed a little at Emma's nonsense, but she did not feel quite easy on the subject. Allen came in just then to bid them good-by, as he was going back to college; and all conversation on the matter ceased.

The next day, at dinner, there was a very perceptible cloud on Mr. Wylie's face—he looked sad and troubled.

"Has anything occurred to disturb you, Herbert?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"Yes," he replied, as though he scarcely knew how to begin it. "I had a very painful letter from Frank Beechcroft this morning, explaining his strange conduct, and informing me that he intends leaving the place at once. He is an upright, noble fellow, and I cannot blame him; but I would have given much if this had not occurred. He has told me everything."

Very much to his surprise, Jessie, who had turned crimson at the beginning of his speech, burst into tears, and suddenly left the table; while Emma sat there, pale and trembling, under a powerful effort to command herself.

"What does this mean?" asked her cousin, anxiously. "Can it be possible that Jessie——"

A dreadful solution of his wife's distress rose to his mind, and almost maddened him; but, with a forced smile, Emma exclaimed, "Don't be making mountains of mole-hills, cousin Herbert; the whole affair, from beginning to end, is only a piece of girlish nonsense, as I will soon convince you. When I get through, you can give me a good shaking, if it will be any relief to you."

Mr. Wylie did not exactly administer the shaking; but he did administer rather a stern reproof, which Emma professed to laugh at; then, going in quest of Jessie, he found her such a wretched little bundle of tears and trembling, that he was obliged to take her in his arms, and soothe her with caresses and protestations of the most lover-like character.

His next performance was to seize Frank Beechcroft, just as he was packing his trunk with an air of the fiercest melancholy, and drag him, almost by the hair of his head, over to the rectory; where he was presented, in due form, to the wicked Emma, whose face burned painfully at the remembrance of that kiss; and then to the *bona fide* Mrs. Wylie, who looked so pretty in her confusion, that her husband thought it would have been an easy matter for the youth to commit himself as he thought he had done.

It took but a short time, after such a promising beginning, for Miss Raybold and Mr. Beechcroft to feel very well acquainted; and matters progressed so rapidly, that Mrs. Wylie was not at all surprised, when her mischievous cousin informed her, that she had given a promise to a certain individual to wear her bridal bonnet to church on the first Sunday after the ceremony that converted her into Mrs. Beechcroft.

## WINNING HIS WAY.

## CHAPTER XI.

## SCOUTING.

"SERGEANT PARKER is hereby ordered to report immediately at General Grant's Head-quarters," was the order which Paul received the next morning. He wondered what General Grant could want of him. He entered the General's tent, and saw a short, thick-set, middle-aged man with sandy whiskers, sitting at a table, reading letters and smoking a cigar. He was dressed in a plain blue blouse, and as he had no straps on his shoulders. Paul thought he was the General's orderly.

"Is General Grant about?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the man, looking up pleasantly.

"I should like to see him," said Paul.

"I am General Grant."

Paul was astonished to find a general so affable and pleasant, for he had seen some lieutenants and captains strut like turkey-cocks, because they wore straps on their shoulders. Paul saluted the General, and said, "I am ordered to report to you, sir."

"O, yes; you are Sergeant Parker, who made a reconnoissance last night; sit down, Sergeant, till I finish my letters." It was spoken so pleasantly and kindly, that Paul said to himself, "He is a gentleman."

When the General had finished his letters he lighted another cigar, and questioned Paul about his adventures; how far it was to the Rebel camp, and how the camp was situated.

"I will give you a sketch of the place," said Paul; and, sitting up to the table, he drew a map, putting down the creeks, the roads, the woods, the distances from point to point, the place where he came upon the pickets, the position of the tents, and all the objects he saw. The General sat in silence, smoking, and looking at Paul with a keen eye. It was drawn neatly and quickly, and with an accuracy which surprised the General. Paul had kept count of his steps from one object to another. By looking up to the stars he had kept the points of the compass, and knew whether he travelled south, or southeast, or southwest, and so he was able to draw an excellent map.

"Where did you study topographical engineering?" the General asked.

"By the kitchen fire," Paul replied.

"A pretty good college to graduate from, especially if a fellow has good grit," said the General, smiling. "Are you willing to undertake a hazardous enterprise?" he asked.

"I am willing to undertake anything for my country," Paul replied.

The General then told him that he wished to obtain information about Fort Henry on the Tennessee River, and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland. He showed him the positions on a map, and said it was an under-

taking of great importance, and which might cost him his life. "I will give you a trustworthy companion," said he.

"I would rather attempt it alone, if you please. Two is one too many; it doubles our risk. If discovered by the Rebels, I could n't help my comrade, neither could he help me. If we keep together, we shall have the same information. I think I shall succeed better alone," said Paul.

"You are right," said the General, who told him that he might prepare for the trip, and that he would be sent up the Tennessee River on a gunboat, and put on shore a few miles from Fort Henry, and that he must return in ten days. "I hear a good report of you, and have confidence in you. I desire accurate information; for if it is not accurate, it may lead to very disastrous results," said the General.

Two nights later, Paul stood alone on the bank of the Tennessee. The gunboat which had brought him was gone back. He could hear the splashing of her wheels growing fainter each moment. He was in the enemy's country, on an undertaking which might cost him his life. If discovered, he would be hung. For an instant his heart failed him, and he felt that he must turn back; then he remembered that he had enlisted in the service of his country, to do his duty, whatever it might be. His duty was before him. His general had directed him to do it. He was upon the ground. Would not God take care of him? Was not the path of duty, although it might lead to death, the only path of safety? There are times when duty is worth more than life. "Whatever is right before the Eternal God, that I will do," said Paul to himself. His fear was gone. He resolved to be bold, yet cautious, and to keep his thoughts perfectly collected under all circumstances. He had succeeded in one reconnoissance, which made him hopeful; but he reflected that success often makes men careless, so he resolved to be always on his guard. He had changed his uniform for a pair of old butter-nut-colored pantaloons, a ragged coat, and a slouched hat which had a hole in the crown. He hardly recognized himself he was so altered in appearance. He wondered if Azalia or Daphne would recognize him. He had no weapon or equipments. There was nothing about him which indicated that he was a soldier of the Union army ready to lay down his life for the old flag.

He walked cautiously along the winding path, noticing all the objects; looking up to the north star at every turn of the road, keeping tally of his steps that he might know the distance travelled. He walked stealthily, expecting every moment to hear the challenge of the Rebel pickets. He was startled by the cry, "Who! Who! Who!" He came to a sudden halt, and then laughed to think that he had been challenged by an owl.

In the morning he came upon a party of men cutting wood, and found that they were Rebel soldiers outside of the picket line. Paul took an axe and went to work, and so became one of them. When they went into camp he accompanied them, carrying the axe on his shoulder, thus passing the picket as a wood-chopper. He found three or four thousand soldiers at Fort Henry, hard at work, throwing up breastworks, digging ditches, hewing tim-

ber, mounting guns. He worked with them, but kept his eyes and ears open, noticing the position of the fort on the bank of the river, and how many guns there were. He found out what troops were there, where they came from, and who commanded them. He learned that a wagon-train was going to Fort Donelson after ammunition. He joined it and passed the picket as one of the train guards. As the wagons were empty, he had a chance to ride and thus saved a weary walk of twelve miles.

The little town of Dover, which is near Fort Donelson, he found alive with troops; regiments were arriving from Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Tennessee. General Pillow was there in command. He was an officer in the army of the United States and fought in Mexico. General Floyd was there with a brigade of Virginians. He was Secretary of War when Buchanan was President, and did what he could to destroy the Union. He was a thief as well as a Rebel. He was a large, coarse man. Paul despised him, and could hardly restrain himself from knocking the villain down when he saw him ride by wearing the uniform of a traitor. There was not much discipline in the Rebel army, and Paul found little difficulty in going through all the camps, ascertaining what regiments were there. It nettled him to hear the boasts of the soldiers that one Southerner could whip five Yankees, but he said nothing for fear of betraying himself. He found no difficulty in obtaining something to eat at a sutler's tent. He was very tired and sleepy when the second night came, but he found a place to sleep at a house in the village.

"What regiment do you belong to?" asked a girl with a red face and grimy hands.

"I am a scout," said Paul.

"Be you a scout? Wal, I hope you will run across Old Abe Linkum. If you do, jest take his *skelph* for me." (She meant his scalp.)

"Wal, if I *catch* him, I reckon I'll *skelph* him," said Paul, flourishing his knife, as if he was ready for such bloody work.

"The Yanks are a set of vagabonds; they are the meanest critters on earth," said the woman. "They'll hang you if they catch you."

"I reckon I won't let 'em catch me," said Paul.

"Where be you going next?"

"Down to Cairo, I reckon; though I go wherever the General sends me."

"May be you would do a little chore for me,—get me some pins, needles, and thread?"

"It is mighty skittish business, but I'll see what I can do," said Paul.

Having obtained his information, his next business was to get away. He waited till the lights were out in the camps at night, then, walking down to the river, found a small boat, jumped in and pushed out into the stream. He could see the sentinels on the parapet of the fort as he floated past, the great guns frowned upon him from the embrasures, but the sentinels did not discover him. Paul congratulated himself that he was beyond the picket line when he heard a hail from both shores at the same time. "Boat ahoy!"

He made no reply. "Boat ahoy! come ashore or I'll fire," said both sentinels. He saw that he could not escape by rowing. They would fire if he attempted to go ahead or turn back. If he went ashore, he would be taken to the guard-house, questioned, probably put into prison, perhaps hung as a spy. He resolved that he would n't go ashore. There was no time for deliberation. It was mid-winter; the air was keen, and there was floating ice in the river. If he remained in the boat he might be shot, so he lowered himself noiselessly into the water. How cold it was! He felt the chill strike through him, setting his teeth to chattering, and his limbs quivering. There was another hail, and then a flash on both shores. The balls went through the boat. He heard the stroke of oars, and saw a boat pushing out from the shore. He darted ahead swimming noiselessly down stream, gradually nearing the shore, for he found that his strength was failing. He heard the men in the boat say, "We are fooled, it is only an empty dug-out."

How hard it was to climb the bank! He could not stand, he was so chilled. Once he rose to his feet, but tumbled like a log to the ground. He wanted to go to sleep, but he knew it would be his last sleep if he yielded. He drained the water from his boots, rubbed his legs, thrashed his hands, and then went reeling and blundering in the darkness over fallen trees. What a wearisome, cheerless night it was! How he longed for a fire,—a cup of warm coffee,—a comfortable bed! He thought of his own bed in the little old house at New Hope, and wished that he might lie there once more, and snuggle down beneath the warm comforters. His clothes were frozen, and notwithstanding he beat his hands till the blood dripped from his fingers, he could get up no warmth. "Halt! Who comes there?" was the sharp challenge which startled him from his dreaming. He was close upon a picket. He turned in an instant, and began to run. He heard footsteps following. The thought that he was pursued roused all his energies. The footsteps came nearer. Putting forth all his strength, holding his breath, Paul went on, stumbling, rising again, leaping, hearing the footsteps of his pursuers coming nearer; suddenly he came to a deep, narrow creek. He did not hesitate an instant, but plunged in, swam to the other bank, gaining the solid ground, and dropping behind a tree just as his pursuer reached the creek; who stopped and listened, but Paul remained perfectly still, hardly daring to breathe, till he heard the fellow go back muttering to himself and cursing the creek. The running had warmed Paul, but he was exhausted and drenched once more. Daybreak came, and he did not dare to travel; so, finding some stacks of corn in a field, he tore one of them open, made a bed inside, drew the bundles over him, shivered awhile, and then dropped asleep.

He awoke suddenly to find his house tumbling to pieces,—torn down by Rebel soldiers.

"Hello! What's here? Who be ye? What are ye up to?" said a sergeant, startled to find a man under the bundles. "Deserter, eh? or a spy, I reckon," said the fellow, holding a pistol to Paul's head.





"Better put up your shooting-irons," said Paul coolly.

"Give an account of yourself, how ye came here, *whar* ye have been, and *whar* ye gwine."

Paul noticed that he said *whar* for where, and replied, "I am a scout, and have been down by the river *whar* the Yankee gunboats is."

"I don't believe it; you look like a scarecrow, but I reckon you are a Yankee spy," said the

sergeant. He searched Paul, but found nothing. He was commanding a cavalry foraging-party, and was a brutal, ignorant fellow, and had been drinking whiskey, and wanted to show that he had power. "Boys, bring a halter; I reckon I'll make this fellow confess that he is a Yankee."

A soldier brought a rope; one end was thrown over the limb of a tree, and the other made into a slip-noose, and put round Paul's neck. Paul did not flinch. To confess that he was a spy was sure death. He was calm. For a moment his thoughts went back to his home. He thought of his mother, and Azalia, but there was no time for such thoughts. He did not

feel that his work was done. "Wal, Sergeant, what be you gwine to do?" he asked.

"Hang you as a spy," said the Sergeant.

"What sort of a report will you make to the General? What do ye think he will do to you when he finds that you have hung one of his scouts?" Paul asked.

"See here, Sergeant, I reckon you are a leetle too fast in this matter," said one of the soldiers.

Paul saw that the time had come for a bold course on his part. He had already ascertained what regiment of cavalry they belonged to. He had seen their colonel at Dover. "What do you suppose Colonel Forrest will say, when he hears of this proceeding of yours?" he asked.

The Sergeant started at the mention of the name of his commander, and he began to see the proceeding in a new light. Paul threw the noose from his neck, and said, in a tone of authority, "I will report you, sir. I will have you arrested. I'll teach you to do your duty better than this. I am an officer. I know General Pillow, General Floyd, General Buckner, and Colonel Forrest. I am out on important business. You found me asleep, and instead of taking me to your superior officer, as you ought to have done, you proceed to hang me. You are drunk, sir, and I'll have you punished."

The Sergeant was very much frightened. He saw how noble a countenance Paul had, and felt his tone of authority. "I did n't mean any harm, sir, I wanted to do my duty," said the sergeant, taking off his hat, and holding down his head.

"Because you are a sergeant, you wanted to show your authority," said Paul. "Now go about your business, all of you, and when I get to General Pillow's head-quarters I will see to your case."

The soldiers who had gathered round started off at once to their work, while Paul walked towards Fort Donelson. He had gone but a few steps, when the sergeant followed him, and, taking off his hat, said, "Please, Colonel, don't be too hard on me, I won't do so again."

"It will be my duty to report you; but if you will promise to be more *keerful* in the future I will tell the General when I make my report not to be too hard," said Paul.

"I'll be more *keerful* next time, and won't get drunk again, Colonel, never."

"Very well," said Paul, walking on till he reached a piece of woods; then, turning from the path, he made his way towards the river again, wondering at his escape. He had a long walk through the woods, but when he reached the gunboats lying in the stream, how his heart leaped for joy!

He kept all he had seen so well in memory, that when he reached Cairo he was able to draw an accurate plan of the forts and country around them.

General Grant listened to his story with great interest, and when Paul had finished said, "You have performed your work acceptably; you understand topography; I wish to keep you at my head-quarters, and therefore appoint you a Lieutenant of Engineers."

It was so unexpected a promotion, and such an expression of confidence, that Paul was very much confused, and could only say, while blushing very red, "I thank you, sir."

## CHAPTER XII.

### MISSED FROM HOME.

How lonesome it was in New Hope through all these days! Everybody missed Paul. He was missed by the school-children, for the teacher who succeeded him was cross and hard, while Paul was always kind and pleasant. He was missed by the congregation on Sunday, for although Háns did his best as leader of the choir, he could not fill Paul's place. He was missed by his mother, who, through the long, wearisome days and lonely nights, thought only of him, her pride, her joy, her hope. How good Azalia was to visit the Post-office every morning to get the letters which Paul wrote to his mother, often finding one for herself! How pleasant to read what he wrote of life in camp! How thrilling the narrative of his adventures, his visit to the forts, his narrow escapes! As she read it, her heart stood still while the letter was wet with tears. What if the rebels had hung him! It was terrible to think of. What could she do to comfort him? How help him, — how relieve his sufferings and hardships? She would knit him a pair of gloves and stockings. But his comrades needed them as well as he. Why not ask Daphne to help? Why not ask all the girls to do something? So she thought the matter over through the long winter night, planning a soldiers' sewing and knitting society.

Pleasant gatherings they had in the vestry of the church on Wednesday afternoons working for the soldiers. Azalia's cheeks were flushed with rare beauty when she read Paul's letters to them with trembling voice. There were many moist eyes, for all felt that, if he and his comrades were undergoing such hardships and dangers for them, that they might have a home and a united country, they ought to do all they could in return; and so, while knitting stockings for the soldiers, their hearts were knit in deeper love and devotion to their country.

But they had something besides Paul's adventures to talk about; for one Monday morning when Mr. Bond, the town treasurer, opened his office, he found that it had been entered by robbers, who had stolen all the money, — several thousand dollars. It was soon discovered that Philip Funk was missing. The sheriffs and constables set themselves to hunt him up. They got upon his track, followed him to the Ohio River, and across into Kentucky; but he was too swift for them, and succeeded in getting into the Rebel lines with the stolen money. Notwithstanding he was a robber, his sister Fanny held her head as high as ever. She did not attend the soldiers' aid society. She hoped that the South would succeed in establishing its independence, and was glad that Philip had gone to help the Southern soldiers. "I hope he will come across Paul," said Fanny to Daphne Dare one day.

"So do I, and I hope that Paul will shoot him," said Daphne, with flashing eyes. She had the spirit of her father, and added, "He is a traitor and a robber, and I hope somebody will shoot him."

Fanny spit at the flag which hung over the street every time she passed it, to show her hatred of it. Daphne was very indignant, and proposed to her associates that they should compel Fanny to wave the stars and stripes; but Azalia said it would be a severer punishment to take no notice of her. "We might make her wave the flag, but that would not make her love it, and such forced loyalty would be of no value."

So, acting upon Azalia's advice, all of the girls passed her by, taking no notice of her on the street, at the Post-office, or in church, not recognizing her by word or look. Fanny bore it awhile with a brazen face, but soon found it very hard to have no one to speak to. The great want of the human heart in time of trouble is sympathy. Our wills may bear us up awhile, but sooner or later we must unburden our feelings, or feel the burning of a slow consuming fire, destroying all our peace and happiness. The days were cheerless to Fanny. If she walked out upon the street, she saw only the averted faces of her former friends. They would not speak to her, and if she addressed them they turned away without answering, — avoiding her as if she was infected with the plague. When the cold northeast storms came, when the clouds hung low upon the hills, when the wind howled in the woods, when the rain pattered upon the withered leaves, how lonesome the hours! She was haughty and self-willed, friendless and alone; but instead of becoming loyal and behaving like a good, sensible girl, she nursed her pride, and comforted herself by thinking that her great-grandfather Funk was a fine Old Virginian gentleman. If a still, small voice whispered that it was mean and wicked in Philip to take money which did not belong to him, she quieted her conscience by the reflection that it was right for the Rebels to do all the damage they could to their enemies in securing their independence. When the storm was loudest, she rejoiced in the hope that some of the Yankee ships would be wrecked, or that the Mississippi River would overflow its bank and drown the Yankee regiments in their camps.

Not so did Azalia listen to the storm. When the great drops rattled upon the roof and dashed against the windows, she thought of Paul and his comrades as rushing into battle amid volleys of musketry; the lightning flashes were the artillery in action, the peals of thunder were like the booming of the cannonade; the mournful sighing of the wind was the wailing of the wounded. She thought of him as marching wearily and alone through the dismal forest to perform deeds of daring; she thought of him as keeping watch through the stormy nights, cold, wet, hungry, and weary; not for glory, or fame, or hope of reward, but because it was his duty, — because God and his country called him. And these were not sad hours to her.

*Carlton.*

## WIVES AND DAUGHTERS.

### CHAPTER X.

#### A CRISIS.

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK had been reading aloud till Lady Cumnor fell asleep; the book rested on her knee, just kept from falling by her hold. She was looking out of the window, not seeing the trees in the park, nor the glimpses of the hills beyond, but thinking how pleasant it would be to have a husband once more;—some one who would work while she sate at her elegant ease in a prettily-furnished drawing-room; and she was rapidly investing this imaginary bread-winner with the form and features of the country surgeon, when there was a slight tap at the door, and, almost before she could rise the object of her thoughts came in. She felt herself blush, and she was not displeased at the consciousness. She advanced to meet him, making a sign towards her sleeping ladyship.

"Very good," said he in a low voice, casting a professional eye on the slumbering figure; "can I speak to you for a minute or two in the library?"

"Is he going to offer?" thought she, with a sudden palpitation, and a conviction of her willingness to accept a man whom an hour before she simply looked upon as one of the category of unmarried men to whom matrimony was possible.

He was only going to make one or two medical inquiries; she found that out very speedily, and considered the conversation as rather flat to her, though it might be instructive to him. She was not aware that he finally made up his mind to propose, during the time that she was speaking—answering his questions in many words, but he was accustomed to winnow the chaff from the corn; and her voice was so soft, her accent so pleasant, that it struck him as particularly agreeable after the broad country accent he was perpetually hearing. Then the harmonious colours of her dress, and her slow and graceful movements, had something of the same soothing effect upon his nerves that a cat's purring has upon some people's. He began to think that he should be fortunate if he could win her, for his own sake. Yesterday he had looked upon her more as a possible stepmother for Molly; to-day he thought more of her as a wife for himself. The remembrance of Lord Cumnor's letter gave her a very becoming consciousness; she wished to attract, and hoped that she was succeeding. Still they only talked of the countess's state for some time; then a lucky shower came on. Mr. Gibson did not care

a jot for rain, but just now it gave him an excuse for lingering.

"It is very stormy weather," said he.

"Yes, very. My daughter writes me word, that for two days last week the packet could not sail from Boulogne."

"Miss Kirkpatrick is at Boulogne, is she?"

"Yes, poor girl; she is at school there, trying to perfect herself in the French language. But, Mr. Gibson, you must not call her Miss Kirkpatrick. Cynthia remembers you with so much—affection, I may say. She was your little patient when she had measles here four years ago, you know. Pray call her Cynthia; she would be quite hurt at such a formal name as Miss Kirkpatrick from you."

"Cynthia seems to me such an out-of-the-way name, only fit for poetry, not for daily use."

"It is mine," said Mrs. Kirkpatrick in a plaintive tone of reproach. "I was christened Hyacinth, and her poor father would have her called after me. I am sorry you don't like it."

Mr. Gibson did not know what to say. He was not quite prepared to plunge into the directly personal style. While he was hesitating, she went on—

"Hyacinth Clare! Once upon a time I was quite proud of my pretty name; and other people thought it pretty, too."

"I've no doubt"—Mr. Gibson began; and then stopped.

"Perhaps I did wrong in yielding to his wish, to have her called by such a romantic name. It may excite prejudice against her in some people; and, poor child! she will have enough to struggle with. A young daughter is a great charge, Mr. Gibson, especially when there is only one parent to look after her."

"You are quite right," said he, recalled to the remembrance of Molly; "though I should have thought that a girl who is so fortunate as to have a mother could not feel the loss of her father so acutely as one who is motherless must suffer from her deprivation."

"You are thinking of your own daughter. It was careless of me to say what I did. Dear child! how well I remember her sweet little face as she lay sleeping on my bed! I suppose she is nearly grown up now. She must be near my Cynthia's age. How I should like to see her!"

"I hope you will. I should like you to see her. I should like you to love my poor little Molly,—to love her as your own"—

He swallowed down something that rose in his throat, and was nearly choking him.

"Is he going to offer? Is he?" she wondered; and she began to tremble in the suspense before he next spoke.

"Could you love her as your daughter? Will you try? Will you give me the right of introducing you to her as her future mother; as my wife?"

There! he had done it—whether it was wise or foolish—he had done it; but he was aware that the question as to its wisdom came into his mind the instant that the words were said past recall.

She hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! Mr. Gibson," she said; and then, a little to his surprise, and a great deal to her own, she burst into hysterical tears: it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood.

"My dear—my dearest," said he, trying to soothe her with word and caress; but, just at the moment, uncertain what name he ought to use. After her sobbing had abated a little, she said herself, as if understanding his difficulty,—

"Call me Hyacinth—your own Hyacinth. I can't bear 'Clare,' it does so remind me of being a governess, and those days are all past now."

"Yes; but surely no one can have been more valued, more beloved, than you have been in this family at least."

"Oh, yes! they have been very good. But still one has always had to remember one's position."

"We ought to tell Lady Cumnor," said he, thinking, perhaps, more of the various duties which lay before him, in consequence of the step he had just taken, than of what his future bride was saying.

"You'll tell her, won't you?" said she, looking up in his face with beseeching eyes. "I always like other people to tell her things, and then I can see how she takes them."

"Certainly! I will do whatever you wish. Shall we go and see if she is awake now?"

"No! I think not. I had better prepare her. You will come to-morrow, won't you? and you will tell her then."

"Yes; that will be best. I ought to tell Molly first. She has the right to know. I do hope you and she will love each other dearly."

"Oh, yes! I'm sure we shall. Then you'll come to-morrow and tell Lady Cumnor? And I'll prepare her."

"I don't see what preparation is necessary; but you know best, my dear. When

can we arrange for you and Molly to meet?"

Just then a servant came in, and the pair started apart.

"Her ladyship is awake, and wishes to see Mr. Gibson."

They both followed the man upstairs; Mrs. Kirkpatrick trying hard to look as if nothing had happened, for she particularly wished "to prepare" Lady Cumnor; that is to say, to give her version of Mr. Gibson's extreme urgency, and her own coy unwillingness.

But Lady Cumnor had observant eyes in sickness as well as in health. She had gone to sleep with the recollection of the passage in her husband's letter full in her mind, and, perhaps, it gave a direction to her waking ideas.

"I'm glad you're not gone, Mr. Gibson. I wanted to tell you—what's the matter with you both? What have you been saying to Clare? I'm sure something has happened."

There was nothing for it, in Mr. Gibson's opinion, but to make a clean breast of it, and tell her ladyship all. He turned round, and took hold of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's hand, and said out straight, "I have been asking Mrs. Kirkpatrick to be my wife, and to be a mother to my child; and she has consented. I hardly know how to thank her enough in words."

"Umph! I don't see any objection. I dare say you'll be very happy. I'm very glad of it! Here! shake hands with me, both of you." Then laughing a little, she added, "It does not seem to me that any exertion has been required on my part."

Mr. Gibson looked perplexed at these words. Mrs. Kirkpatrick reddened.

"Did she not tell you? Oh, then, I must. It's too good a joke to be lost, especially as everything has ended so well. When Lord Cumnor's letter came this morning—this very morning, I gave it to Clare to read aloud to me, and I saw she suddenly came to a full stop, where no full stop could be, and I thought it was something about Agnes; so I took the letter and read—stay! I'll read the sentence to you. Where's the letter, Clare? Oh! don't trouble yourself; here it is. 'How are Clare and Gibson getting on? You despised my advice to help on that affair, but I really think a little match-making would be a very pleasant amusement, now that you are shut up in the house; and I cannot conceive any marriage more suitable.' You see, you have my Lord's full approbation. But I must write, and tell him you

have managed your own affairs without any interference of mine. Now we'll just have a little medical talk, Mr. Gibson, and then you and Clare shall finish your tête-à-tête."

They were neither of them quite as desirous of further conversation together as they had been before the passage out of Lord Cumnor's letter had been read aloud. Mr. Gibson tried not to think about it, for he was aware that, if he dwelt upon it, he might get to fancy all sorts of things as to the conversation which had ended in his offer. But Lady Cumnor was imperious now, as always.

"Come, no nonsense. I always made my girls go and have tête-à-têtes with the men who were to be their husbands, whether they would or no: there's a great deal to be talked over before every marriage, and you two are certainly old enough to be above affectation. Go away with you."

So there was nothing for it but for them to return to the library; Mrs. Kirkpatrick pouting a little, and Mr. Gibson feeling more like his own cool, sarcastic self, by many degrees, than he had done when last in that room.

She began, half crying, —

"I cannot tell what poor Kirkpatrick would say if he knew what I have done. He did so dislike the notion of second marriages, poor fellow."

"Let us hope that he does not know, then; or that, if he does know, he is wiser — I mean, that he sees how second marriages may be most desirable and expedient in some cases."

Altogether, this second tête-à-tête, done to command, was not so satisfactory as the first; and Mr. Gibson was quite alive to the necessity of proceeding on his round to see his patients before very much time had elapsed.

"We shall shake down into uniformity before long, I've no doubt," said he to himself as he rode away. "It's hardly to be expected that our thoughts should run in the same groove all at once. Nor should I like it," he added. "It would be very flat and stagnant to have only an echo of one's own opinions from one's wife. Heigho! I must tell Molly about it: dear little woman, I wonder how she'll take it! It's done, in a great measure, for her good." And then he lost himself in recapitulating Mrs. Kirkpatrick's good qualities, and the advantages to be gained to his daughter from the step he had just taken.

It was too late to go round by Hamley that afternoon. The Towers and the Towers' round lay just in the opposite direction

to Hamley. So it was the next morning before Mr. Gibson arrived at the hall, timing his visit as well as he could so as to have half-an-hour's private talk with Molly before Mrs. Hamley came down into the drawing-room. He thought that his daughter would require sympathy after receiving the intelligence he had to communicate; and he knew there was no one more fit to give it than Mrs. Hamley.

It was a brilliantly hot summer's morning; men in their shirt-sleeves were in the fields getting in the early harvest of oats; as Mr. Gibson rode slowly along, he could see them over the tall hedge-rows, and even hear the soothing measured sound of the fall of the long swathes as they were mown. The labourers seemed too hot to talk; the dog, guarding their coats and cans, lay panting loudly on the other side of the elm, under which Mr. Gibson stopped for an instant to survey the scene, and gain a little delay before the interview that he wished was well over. In another minute he had snapped at himself for his weakness, and put spurs to his horse. He came up to the hall at a good sharp trot; it was earlier than the usual time of his visits, and no one was expecting him; all the stable-men were in the fields, but that signified little to Mr. Gibson; he walked his horse about for five minutes or so before taking him into the stable, and loosened his girths, examining him with perhaps unnecessary exactitude. He went into the house by a private door, and made his way into the drawing-room, half expecting, however, that Molly would be in the garden. She had been there, but it was too hot and dazzling now for her to remain out of doors, and she had come in by the open window of the drawing-room. Oppressed with the heat, she had fallen asleep in an easy-chair, her bonnet and open book upon her knee, one arm hanging listlessly down. She looked very soft, and young, and childlike; and a gush of love sprang into her father's heart as he gazed at her.

"Molly!" said he, gently, taking the little brown hand that was hanging down, and holding it in his own. "Molly!"

She opened her eyes, that for one moment had no recognition in them. Then the light came brilliantly into them, and she sprang up, and threw her arms round his neck, exclaiming, —

"Oh, papa, my dear, dear papa! What made you come while I was asleep? I lose the pleasure of watching for you."

Mr. Gibson turned a little paler than he had been before. He still held her hand,

and drew her to a seat by him on a sofa, without speaking. There was no need; she was chattering away.

"I was up so early! It is so charming to be out here in the fresh morning air. I think that made me sleepy. But isn't it a gloriously hot day? I wonder if the Italian skies they talk about can be bluer than that—that little bit you see just between the oaks—there!"

She pulled her hand away, and used both it and the other to turn her father's head, so that he should exactly see the very bit she meant. She was rather struck by his unusual silence.

"Have you heard from Miss Eyre, papa? How are they all? And this fever that is about? Do you know, papa, I don't think you are looking well? You want me at home to take care of you. How soon may I come home?"

"Don't I look well? That must be all your fancy, goosey. I feel uncommonly well; and I ought to look well, for—I have a piece of news for you, little woman." (He felt that he was doing his business very awkwardly, but he was determined to plunge on.) "Can you guess it?"

"How should I?" said she; but her tone was changed, and she was evidently uneasy, as with the presage of an instinct.

"Why, you see, my love," said he, again taking her hand, "that you are in a very awkward position—a girl growing up in such a family as mine—young men—which was a piece of confounded stupidity on my part. And I am obliged to be away so much."

"But there is Miss Eyre," said she, sick with the strengthening indefinite presage of what was to come. "Dear Miss Eyre, I want nothing but her and you."

"Still there are times like the present when Miss Eyre cannot be with you; her home is not with us; she has other duties. I've been in great perplexity for some time; but at last I've taken a step which will, I hope, make us both happier."

"You're going to be married again," said she, helping him out, with a quiet dry voice, and gently drawing her hand out of his.

"Yes. To Mrs. Kirkpatrick—you remember her! They call her Clare at the Towers. You recollect how kind she was to you that day you were left there?"

She did not answer. She could not tell what words to use. She was afraid of saying anything, lest the passion of anger, dislike, indignation—whatever it was that was boiling up in her breast—should find vent in cries and screams, or worse, in raging

words that could never be forgotten. It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone.

Mr. Gibson saw that her silence was unnatural, and half guessed at the cause of it. But he knew that she must have time to reconcile herself to the idea, and still believed that it would be for her eventual happiness. He had, besides, the relief of feeling that the secret was told, the confidence made, which he had been dreading for the last twenty-four hours. He went on recapitulating all the advantages of the marriage; he knew them off by heart now.

"She's a very suitable age for me. I don't know how old she is exactly, but she must be nearly forty. I shouldn't have wished to marry any one younger. She's highly respected by Lord and Lady Cumnor and their family, which is of itself a character. She has very agreeable and polished manners—of course, from the circles she has been thrown into—and you and I, goosey, are apt to be a little brusque, or so; we must brush up our manners now."

No remark from her on this little bit of playfulness. He went on—

"She has been accustomed to housekeeping—economical housekeeping, too—for of late years she has had a school at Ashcombe, and has had, of course, to arrange all things for a large family. And last, but not least, she has a daughter—about your age, Molly—who, of course, will come and live with us, and be a nice companion—a sister—for you."

Still she was silent. At length she said,—

"So I was sent out of the house that all this might be quietly arranged in my absence?"

Out of the bitterness of her heart she spoke, but she was roused out of her assumed impassiveness by the effect produced. Her father started up, and quickly left the room, saying something to himself—what, she could not hear, though she ran after him, followed him through dark stone passages into the glare of the stable-yard, into the stables—

"Oh, papa, papa—I'm not myself—I don't know what to say about this hateful—this detestable!"—

He led his horse out. She did not know if he heard her word. Just as he mounted, he turned round upon her with a gray grim face—

"I think it's better for both of us, for me to go away now. We may say things difficult to forget. We are both much agitated. By to-morrow we shall be more composed



you will have thought it over, and have seen that the principal—one great motive, I mean—was your good. You may tell Mrs. Hamley—I meant to have told her myself, I will come again to-morrow. Good-by, Molly."

For many minutes after he had ridden away—long after the sound of his horse's hoofs on the round stones of the paved lane, beyond the home-meadows, had died away—Molly stood there, shading her eyes, and looking at the empty space of air in which his form had last appeared. Her very breath seemed suspended; only, two or three times, after long intervals she drew a miserable sigh, which was caught up into a sob. She turned away at last, but could not go into the house, could not tell Mrs. Hamley, could not forget how her father had looked and spoken—and left her.

She went out by a side-door—it was the way by which the gardeners passed when they took the manure into the garden—and the walk to which it led was concealed from sight as much as possible by shrubs and evergreens and over-arching trees. No one would know what became of her, and, with the ingratitude of misery she added to herself, no one would care. Mrs. Hamley had her own husband, her own children, her close home interests—she was very good and kind, but there was a bitter grief in Molly's heart, with which the stranger could not intermeddle. She went quickly on to the bourn which she had fixed for herself—a seat almost surrounded by the drooping leaves of a weeping-ash—a seat on the long broad terrace walk on the other side of the wood that overlooked the pleasant slope of the meadows beyond; the walk had probably been made to command this sunny, peaceful landscape, with trees, and a church spire, two or three red-tiled roofs of old cottages, and a purple bit of rising ground in the distance; and at some previous date, when there might have been a large family of Hamleys residing at the hall, ladies in hoops, and gentlemen in bag-wigs with swords by their sides, might have filled up the breadth of the terrace, as they sauntered, smiling, along. But no one ever cared to saunter there now. It was a deserted walk. The squire or his sons might cross it in passing to a little gate that led to the meadow beyond; but no one loitered there. Molly almost thought that no one knew of the hidden seat under the ash-tree but herself; for there were not more gardeners employed upon the grounds than were necessary to keep the kitchen-gardens and such of the ornamental part as was frequented by

the family, or in sight of the house, in good order.

When she had once got to the seat she broke out with suppressed passion of grief; she did not care to analyze the sources of her tears and sobs—her father was going to be married again—her father was angry with her; she had done very wrong—he had gone away displeased; she had lost his love, he was going to be married—away from her—away from his child—his little daughter—forgetting her own dear, dear mother. So she thought in a tumultuous kind of way, sobbing till she was wearied out, and had to gain strength by being quiet for a time, to break forth into her passion of tears afresh. She had cast herself on the ground—that natural throne for violent sorrow—and leant up against the old moss-grown seat; sometimes burying her face in her hands; sometimes clasping them together, as if by the tight painful grasp of her fingers she could deaden mental suffering.

She did not see Roger Hamley returning from the meadows, nor hear the click of the little white gate. He had been out dredging in ponds and ditches, and had his wet sling-net, with its imprisoned treasures of nastiness, over his shoulder. He was coming home to lunch, having always a fine mid-day appetite, though he pretended to despise the meal in theory. But he knew that his mother liked his companionship then; she depended much upon her luncheon, and was seldom downstairs and visible to her family much before the time. So he overcame his theory, for the sake of his mother, and had his reward in the hearty relish with which he kept her company in eating.

He did not see Molly as he crossed the terrace-walk on his way homewards. He had gone about twenty yards on the small wood-path at right angles to the terrace, when, looking among the grass and wild plants under the trees, he spied out one which was rare, one which he had been long wishing to find in flower, and saw it at last with those bright keen eyes of his. Down went his net, skilfully twisted so as to retain its contents, while it lay amid the herbage, and he himself went with light and well-planted footsteps in search of the treasure. He was so great a lover of nature, that, without any thought, but habitually, he always avoided treading unnecessarily on any plant; who knew what long-sought growth or insect might develop itself in what now appeared but insignificant?

His steps led him in the direction of the ash-tree seat, much less screened from ob-

servation on this side than on the terrace. He stopped; he saw a light-coloured dress on the ground—somebody half-lying on the seat, so still just then, he wondered if the person, whoever it was, had fallen ill or fainted. He paused to watch. In a minute or two the sobs broke out again—the words. It was Miss Gibson crying out in a broken voice,—

“Oh, papa, papa! if you would but come back!

For a minute or two he thought it would be kinder to leave her believing herself unobserved; he had even made a retrograde step or two, on tip-toe; but then he heard the miserable sobbing again. It was farther than his mother could walk, or else, be the sorrow what it would, she was the natural comforter of this girl, her visitor. However, whether it was right or wrong, delicate or obtrusive, when he heard the sad voice talking again, in such tones of un comforted, lonely misery, he turned back, and went to the green tent under the ash-tree. She started up when he came thus close to her; she tried to check her sobs, and instinctively smoothed her wet tangled hair back with her hands.

He looked upon her with grave, kind sympathy, but he did not know exactly what to say.

“Is it lunch-time?” said she, trying to believe that he did not see the traces of her tears and the disturbance of her features—that he had not seen her lying, sobbing her heart out there.

“I don’t know. I was going home to lunch. But—you must let me say it—I couldn’t go on when I saw your distress. Has anything happened?—anything in which I can help you, I mean; for, of course, I’ve no right to make the inquiry, if it is any private sorrow, in which I can be of no use.”

She had exhausted herself so much with crying, that she felt as if she could neither stand nor walk just yet. She sat down on the seat, and sighed, and turned so pale, he thought she was going to faint.

“Wait a moment,” said he, quite unnecessarily, for she could not have stirred; and he was off like a shot to some spring of water that he knew of in the wood, and in a minute or two he returned with careful steps, bringing a little in a broad green leaf, turned into an impromptu cup. Little as it was, it did her good.

“Thank you!” she said: “I can walk back now, in a short time. Don’t stop.”

“You must let me,” said he: “my mother

wouldn’t like me to leave you to come home alone, while you are so faint.”

So they remained in silence for a little while; he, breaking off and examining one or two abnormal leaves of the ash-tree, partly from the custom of his nature, partly to give her time to recover.

“Papa is going to be married again,” said she, at length.

She could not have said why she told him this; an instant before she spoke, she had no intention of doing so. He dropped the leaf he held in his hand, turned round, and looked at her. Her poor wistful eyes were filling with tears as they met his, with a dumb appeal for sympathy. Her look was much more eloquent than her words. There was a momentary pause before he replied, and then it was more because he felt that he must say something than that he was in any doubt as to the answer to the question he asked.

“You are sorry for it?”

She did not take her eyes away from his, as her quivering lips formed the word “Yes,” though her voice made no sound. He was silent again now; looking on the ground, kicking softly at a loose pebble with his foot. His thoughts did not come readily to the surface in the shape of words; nor was he apt at giving comfort till he saw his way clear to the real source from which consolation must come. At last he spoke,—almost as if he was reasoning out the matter with himself.

“It seems as if there might be cases where—setting the question of love entirely on one side—it must be almost a duty to find some one to be a substitute for the mother. . . . I can believe,” said he, in a different tone of voice, and looking at Molly afresh, “that this step may be greatly for your father’s happiness—it may relieve him from many cares, and may give him a pleasant companion.”

“He had me. You don’t know what we were to each other—at least what he was to me,” she added, humbly.

“Still he must have thought it for the best, or he wouldn’t have done it. He may have thought it the best for your sake even more than for his own.”

“That is what he tried to convince me of.”

Roger began kicking the pebble again. He had not got hold of the right end of the clue. Suddenly he looked up.

“I want to tell you of a girl I know. Her mother died when she was about sixteen—the eldest of a large family. From that

time—all through the bloom of her youth—she gave herself up to her father, first as his comforter, afterwards as his companion, friend, secretary—anything you like. He was a man with a great deal of business on hand, and often came home only to set to afresh to preparations for the next day's work. Harriet was always there, ready to help, to talk, or to be silent. It went on for eight or ten years in this way; and then her father married again,—a woman not many years older than Harriet herself. Well—they are just the happiest set of people I know—you wouldn't have thought it likely, would you?"

She was listening, but she had no heart to say anything. Yet she was interested in this little story of Harriet—a girl who had been so much to her father, more than Molly in this early youth of hers could have been to Mr. Gibson. "How was it?" she sighed out at last.

"Harriet thought of her father's happiness before she thought of her own," Roger answered, with something of severe brevity. Molly needed the bracing. She began to cry again a little.

"If it were for papa's happiness"—

"He must believe that it is. Whatever you fancy, give him a chance. He cannot have much comfort, I should think, if he sees you fretting or pining,—you who have been so much to him, as you say. The lady herself, too—if Harriet's step-mother had been a selfish woman, and been always clutching after the gratification of her own wishes; but she was not: she was as anxious for Harriet to be happy as Harriet was for her father—and your father's future wife may be another of the same kind, though such people are rare."

"I don't think she is, though," murmured Molly, a waft of recollection bringing to her mind the details of her day at the Towers long ago.

Roger did not want to hear Molly's reasons for this doubting speech. He felt as if he had no right to hear more of Mr. Gibson's family life, past, present, or to come, than was absolutely necessary for him, in order that he might comfort and help the crying girl, whom he had come upon so unexpectedly. And besides, he wanted to go home, and be with his mother at lunch-time. Yet he could not leave her alone.

"It is right to hope for the best about everybody, and not to expect the worst. This sounds like a truism, but it has comforted me before now, and some day you'll find it useful. One has always to try to think more of others than of one's self, and it is

best not to prejudge people on the bad side. My sermons aren't long, are they? Have they given you an appetite for lunch? Sermons always make me hungry, I know."

He appeared to be waiting for her to get up and come along with him, as indeed he was. But he meant her to perceive that he should not leave her; so she rose up languidly, too languid to say how much she should prefer being left alone, if he would only go away without her. She was very weak, and stumbled over the straggling root of a tree that projected across the path. He, watchful though silent, saw this stumble, and, putting out his hand, held her up from falling. He still held her hand when the occasion was past; this little physical failure impressed on his heart how young and helpless she was, and he yearned to her, remembering the passion of sorrow in which he had found her, and longing to be of some little tender bit of comfort to her before they parted—before their tête-à-tête walk was merged in the general familiarity of the household life. Yet he did not know what to say.

"You will have thought me hard," he burst out at length, as they were nearing the drawing-room windows and the garden-door. "I never can manage to express what I feel, somehow I always fall to philosophizing, but I am sorry for you. Yes, I am; it's beyond my power to help you, as far as altering facts goes, but I can feel for you in a way which it's best not to talk about, for it can do no good. Remember how sorry I am for you! I shall often be thinking of you, though I dare say it's best not to talk about it again."

She said, "I know you are sorry," under her breath, and then she broke away, and ran indoors, and upstairs to the solitude of her own room. He went straight to his mother, who was sitting before the untasted luncheon, as much annoyed by the mysterious unpunctuality of her visitor as she was capable of being with anything; for she had heard that Mr. Gibson had been, and was gone, and she could not discover if he had left any message for her; and her anxiety about her own health, which some people esteemed hypochondriacal, always made her particularly craving for the wisdom which might fall from her doctor's lips.

"Where have you been, Roger? Where is Molly?—Miss Gibson, I mean," for she was careful to keep up a barrier of forms between the young man and young woman who were thrown together in the same household.

"I've been out dredging. (By the way, I left my net on the terrace walk.) I found

Miss Gibson sitting there, crying as if her heart would break. Her father is going to be married again."

"Married again! You don't say so."

"Yes, he is; and she takes it very hardly, poor girl. Mother, I think if you could send some one to her with a glass of wine, a cup of tea, or something of that sort—she was very nearly fainting"—

"I'll go to her myself, poor child," said Mrs. Hamley, rising.

"Indeed you must not," said he, laying his hand upon her arm. "We have kept you waiting already too long; you are looking quite pale. Hammond can take it," he continued, ringing the bell. She sat down again, almost stunned with surprise.

"Whom is he going to marry?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask, and she didn't tell me."

"That's so like a man. Why, half the character of the affair lies in the question of whom it is that he is going to marry."

"I dare say I ought to have asked. But somehow I'm not a good one on such occasions. I was as sorry as could be for her, and yet I couldn't tell what to say."

"What did you say?"

"I gave her the best advice in my power."

"Advice! you ought to have comforted her. Poor little Molly!"

"I think that if advice is good it's the best comfort."

"That depends on what you mean by advice. Hush! here she is."

"To their surprise, Molly came in, trying hard to look as usual. She had bathed her eyes, and arranged her hair; and was making a great struggle to keep from crying and to bring her voice into order. She was unwilling to distress Mrs. Hamley by the sight of pain and suffering. She did not know that she was following Roger's injunctions to think more of others than of herself—but so she was. Mrs. Hamley was not sure if it was wise in her to begin on the piece of news she had just heard from her son; but she was too full of it herself to talk of anything else. "So I hear your father is going to be married, my dear? May I ask whom it is to?"

"Mrs. Kirkpatrick, I think she was governess a long time ago at the Countess of Cumnor's. She stays with them a great deal, and they call her Clare, and I believe they are very fond of her." Molly tried to speak of her future stepmother in the most favourable manner she knew how.

"I think I've heard of her. Then she is not very young? That's as it should be. A widow too. Has she any family?"

"One girl, I believe. But I know so little about her!"

Molly was very near crying again.

"Never mind, my dear. That will all come in good time. Roger, you've hardly eaten anything; where are you going?"

"To fetch my dredging-net. It's full of things I don't want to lose. Besides, I never eat much, as a general thing." The truth was partly told, not all. He thought he had better leave the other two alone. His mother had such sweet power of sympathy, that she would draw the sting out of the girl's heart in a tête-à-tête. As soon as he was gone, Molly lifted up her poor swelled eyes, and, looking at Mrs. Hamley, she said,—

"He was so good to me. I mean and try to remember all he said."

"I'm glad to hear it, love; very glad. From what he told me, I was afraid he had been giving you a little lecture. He has a good heart, but he isn't so tender in his manner as Osborne. Roger is a little rough sometimes."

"Then I like roughness. It did me good. It made me feel how badly—oh, Mrs. Hamley, I did behave so badly to papa this morning."

She rose up and threw herself into Mrs. Hamley's arms, and sobbed upon her breast. Her sorrow was not now for the fact that her father was going to be married again, but for her own ill-behaviour.

If Roger was not tender in words, he was in deeds. Unreasonably and possibly exaggerated as Molly's grief had appeared to him, it was real suffering to her; and he took some pains to lighten it, in his own way, which was characteristic enough. That evening he adjusted his microscope, and put the treasures he had collected in his morning's ramble on a little table; and then he asked his mother to come and admire. Of course Molly came too, and this was what he had intended. He tried to interest her in his pursuit, cherished her first little morsel of curiosity, and nursed it into a very proper desire for further information. Then he brought out books on the subject, and translated the slightly pompous and technical language into homely every-day speech. Molly had come down to dinner, wondering how the long hours till bedtime would ever pass away: hours during which she must not speak on the one thing that would be occupying her mind to the exclusion of all others; for she was afraid that already she had wearied Mrs. Hamley with it during their afternoon tête-à-tête. But prayers and bedtime came long before she had expected; she had been refreshed by a new current of

thought, and she was very thankful to Roger. And now there was to-morrow to come, and a confession of penitence to be made to her father.

But Mr. Gibson did not want speech or words. He was not fond of expressions of feeling at any time, and perhaps, too, he felt that the less said the better on a subject about which it was evident that his daughter and he were not thoroughly and impulsively in harmony. He read her repentance in her eyes; he saw how much she had suffered; and he had a sharp pang at his heart in consequence. But he stopped her from speaking out her regret at her behaviour the day before, by a "There, there, that will do. I know all you want to say. I know my little Molly — my silly little goosey — better than she knows herself. I've brought you an invitation. Lady Cumnor wants you to go and spend next Thursday at the Towers!"

"Do you wish me to go?" said she, her heart sinking.

"I wish you and Hyacinth to become better acquainted — to learn to love each other."

"Hyacinth!" said Molly, entirely bewildered.

"Yes, Hyacinth! It's the silliest name I ever heard of; but it's hers, and I must call her by it. I can't bear Clare, which is what my lady and all the family at the Towers call her; and 'Mrs. Kirkpatrick' is formal and nonsensical too, as she'll change her name so soon."

"When, papa?" asked Molly, feeling as if she were living in a strange, unknown world.

"Not till after Michaelmas." And then, continuing on his own thoughts, he added, "And the worst is, she's gone and perpetuated her own affected name by having her daughter called after her. Cynthia! One thinks of the moon, and the man in the moon with his bundle of faggots. I'm thankful you're plain Molly, child."

"How old is she — Cynthia, I mean?"

"Ay, get accustomed to the name. I should think Cynthia Kirkpatrick was about as old as you are. She's at school in France, picking up airs and graces. She's to come home for the wedding, so you'll be able to get acquainted with her then; though I think she's to go back again for another half-year or so."

## CHAPTER XI.

### MAKING FRIENDSHIP.

MR. GIBSON believed that Cynthia Kirk-

patrick was to return to England to be present at her mother's wedding; but Mrs. Kirkpatrick had no such intention. She was not what is commonly called a woman of determination; but somehow what she disliked she avoided, and what she liked she tried to do, or to have. So although in the conversation, which she had already led to, as to the when and the how she was to be married, she had listened quietly to Mr. Gibson's proposal, that Molly and Cynthia should be the two bridesmaids, she had felt how disagreeable it would be to her to have her young daughter flashing out her beauty, by the side of the faded bride, her mother; and as the further arrangements for the wedding became more definite, she saw further reasons in her own mind for Cynthia's remaining quietly at her school at Boulogne.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick had gone to bed that first night of her engagement to Mr. Gibson, fully anticipating a speedy marriage. She looked to it as a release from the thralldom of keeping school; keeping an unprofitable school, with barely enough of pupils to pay for house-rent and taxes, food, washing, and the requisite masters. She saw no reason for ever going back to Ashecombe, except to wind up her affairs, and to pack up her clothes. She hoped that Mr. Gibson's ardour would be such that he would press on the marriage, and urge her never to resume her school drudgery, but to relinquish it now and for ever. She even made up a very pretty, very passionate speech for him in her own mind; quite sufficiently strong to prevail upon her, and to overthrow the scruples which she felt that she ought to have at telling the parents of her pupils that she did not intend to resume school, and that they must find another place of education for their daughters, in the last week but one of the midsummer holidays.

It was rather like a douche of cold water on Mrs. Kirkpatrick's plans, when the next morning at breakfast Lady Cumnor began to decide upon the arrangements and duties of the two middle-aged lovers.

"Of course you can't give up your school all at once, Clare. The wedding can't be before Christmas, but that will do very well. We shall all be down at the Towers; and it will be a nice amusement for the children to go over to Ashecombe, and see you married."

"I don't think — I'm afraid — I don't believe Mr. Gibson will like waiting so long; men are so impatient, under these circumstances."

"Oh, nonsense! Lord Cumnor has recommended you to his tenants, and I am sure

I wouldn't like them to be put to any inconvenience. Mr. Gibson will see that in a moment. He's a man of sense, or else he wouldn't be our family doctor. Now, what are you going to do about your little girl? Have you fixed yet?

"No. Yesterday there seemed so little time, and when one is agitated it is so difficult to think of anything. Cynthia is nearly eighteen, old enough to go out as a governess, if he wishes it, but I don't think he will. He is so generous and kind!"

"Well! I must give you time to settle some of your affairs to day. Don't waste it in sentiment; you're too old for that. Come to a clear understanding with each other; it will be for your happiness in the long-run."

So they did come to a clear understanding about one or two things. To Mrs. Kirkpatrick's dismay, she found that Mr. Gibson had no more idea than Lady Cunnor of her breaking faith with the parents of her pupils. Though he really was at a serious loss as to what was to become of Molly until she could be under the protection of his new wife at her own home, and though his domestic worries teased him more and more every day, he was too honourable to think of persuading Mrs. Kirkpatrick to give up school a week sooner than was right for his sake. He did not even perceive how easy the task of persuasion would be; with all her winning wiles she could scarcely lead him to feel impatience for the wedding to take place at Michaelmas.

"I can hardly tell what a comfort and relief it will be to me, Hyacinth, when you are once my wife—the mistress of my home—poor little Molly's mother and protector; but I wouldn't interfere with your previous engagements for the world. It wouldn't be right."

"Thank you, my own love. How good you are! So many men would think only of their own wishes and interests! I'm sure the parents of my dear pupils will admire you—will be quite surprised at your consideration for their interests."

"Don't tell them, then. I hate being admired. Why shouldn't you say it is your wish to keep on your school till they've had time to look out for another?"

"Because it isn't," said she, daring all. "I long to be making you happy; I want to make your home a place of rest and comfort to you; and I do so wish to cherish your sweet Molly, as I hope to do, when I come to be her mother. I can't take virtue to myself which doesn't belong to me. If I have to speak for myself, I shall say 'Good

people, find a school for your daughters by Michaelmas,—for after that time I must go and make the happiness of others. I can't bear to think of your long rides in November—coming home wet at night with no one to take care of you. Oh! if you leave it to me, I shall advise the parents to take their daughters away from the care of one whose heart will be absent. Though I couldn't consent to any time before Michaelmas—that wouldn't be fair or right—and I'm sure you wouldn't urge me—you are too good."

"Well, if you think that they will consider we have acted uprightly by them, let it be Michaelmas with all my heart. What does Lady Cunnor say?"

"Oh! I told her I was afraid you wouldn't like waiting, because of your difficulties with your servants, and because of Molly—it would be so desirable to enter on the new relationship with her as soon as possible."

"To be sure; so it would. Poor child! I'm afraid the intelligence of my engagement has rather startled her."

"Cynthia will feel it deeply, too," said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, unwilling to let her daughter be behind Mr. Gibson's in sensibility and affection.

"We will have her over to the wedding! She and Molly shall be bridesmaids," said Mr. Gibson, in the unguarded warmth of his heart.

This plan did not quite suit Mrs. Kirkpatrick; but she thought it best not to oppose it, until she had a presentable excuse to give, and perhaps also some reason would naturally arise out of future circumstances; so at this time she only smiled, and softly pressed the hand she held in hers.

It is a question whether Mrs. Kirkpatrick or Molly wished the most for the day to be over which they were to spend together at the Towers. Mrs. Kirkpatrick was rather weary of girls as a class. All the trials of her life were connected with girls in some way. She was very young when she first became a governess, and had been worsted in her struggles with her pupils, in the first place she ever went to. Her elegance of appearance and manner, and her accomplishments, more than her character and acquirements, had rendered it more easy for her than for most to obtain good "situations;" and she had been absolutely petted in some; but still she was constantly encountering naughty or stubborn, or over-conscientious, or severe-judging, or curious and observant girls. And again, before

Cynthia was born, she had longed for a boy, thinking it possible that if some three or four intervening relations died, he might come to be a baronet; and instead of a son, lo and behold it was a daughter! Nevertheless, with all her dislike to girls in the abstract as "the plagues of her life" (and her aversion was not diminished by the fact of her having kept a school for "young ladies" at Ashcombe), she really meant to be as kind as she could be to her new step-daughter, whom she remembered principally as a black-haired, sleepy child, in whose eyes she had read admiration of herself. Mrs. Kirkpatrick accepted Mr. Gibson principally because she was tired of the struggle of earning her own livelihood; but she liked him personally — nay, she even loved him in her torpid way, and she intended to be good to his daughter, though she felt as if it would have been easier for her to have been good to his son.

Molly was bracing herself up in her way too. "I will be like Harriet. I will think of others. I won't think of myself," she kept repeating all the way to the Towers. But there was no selfishness in wishing that the day was come to an end, and that she did very heartily. Mrs. Hamley sent her thither in the carriage, which was to wait and bring her back at night. Mrs. Hamley wanted Molly to make a favourable impression, and she sent for her to come and show herself before she set out.

"Don't put on your silk gown — your white muslin will look the nicest, my dear."

"Not my silk? it is quite new! I had it to come here."

"Still, I think your white muslin suits you the best." 'Anything but that horrid plaid silk' was the thought in Mrs. Hamley's mind; and, thanks to her, Molly set off for the Towers, looking a little quaint, it is true, but thoroughly lady-like, if she was old-fashioned. Her father was to meet her there; but he had been detained, and she had to face Mrs. Kirkpatrick by herself, the recollection of her last day of misery at the Towers fresh in her mind as if it had been yesterday. Mrs. Kirkpatrick was as caressing as could be. She held Molly's hand in hers, as they sat together in the library, after the first salutations were over. She kept stroking it from time to time, and purring out inarticulate sounds of loving satisfaction, as she gazed in the blushing face.

"What eyes! so like your dear father's! How we shall love each other — sha'n't we, darling? For his sake!"

"I'll try," said Molly, bravely; and then she could not finish her sentence.

"And you've just got the same beautiful black curling hair!" said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, softly lifting one of Molly's curls from off her white temple.

"Papa's hair is growing gray," said Molly.

"Is it? I never see it. I never shall see it. He will always be to me the handsomest of men."

Mr. Gibson was really a very handsome man, and Molly was pleased with the compliment; but she could not help saying, —

"Still he will grow old, and his hair will grow gray. I think he will be just as handsome, but it won't be as a young man."

"Ah! that's just it, love. He'll always be handsome; some people always are. And he is so fond of you, dear." Molly's colour flashed into her face. She did not want an assurance of her own father's love from this strange woman. She could not help being angry; all she could do was to keep silent. "You don't know how he speaks of you; 'his little treasure,' as he calls you. I'm almost jealous sometimes."

Molly took her hand away, and her heart began to harden; these speeches were so discordant to her. But she set her teeth together, and "tried to be good."

"We must make him so happy. I'm afraid he has had a great deal to annoy him at home; but we will do away with all that now. You must tell me," seeing the cloud in Molly's eyes, "what he likes and dislikes, for of course you will know."

Molly's face cleared a little; of course she did know. She had not watched and loved him so long without believing that she understood him better than any one else; though how he had come to like Mrs. Kirkpatrick enough to wish to marry her, was an unsolved problem that she unconsciously put aside as inexplicable. Mrs. Kirkpatrick went on, — "All men have their fancies and antipathies, even the wisest. I have known some gentlemen annoyed beyond measure by the merest trifles; leaving a door open, or spilling tea in their saucers, or a shawl crookedly put on. Why," continued she, lowering her voice, "I know of a house to which Lord Hollingsford will never be asked again because he didn't wipe his shoes on both the mats in the hall! Now you must tell me what you dear father dislikes most in these fanciful ways, and I shall take care to avoid it. You must be my little friend and helper in pleasing him. It will be such a pleasure to me to attend to his slightest

fancies. About my dress, too—what colours does he like best? I want to do everything in my power with a view to his approval."

Molly was gratified by all this, and began to think that really, after all, perhaps her father had done well for himself; and that, if she could help towards his new happiness, she ought to do it. So she tried very conscientiously to think over Mr. Gibson's wishes and ways; to ponder over what annoyed him the most in his household.

"I think," said she, "papa isn't particular about many things; but I think our not having the dinner quite punctual—quite ready for him when he comes in, fidgets him more than anything. You see, he has often had a long ride, and there is another long ride to come, and he has only half-an-hour—sometimes only a quarter—to eat his dinner in."

"Thank you, my own love. Punctuality! Yes; it's a great thing in a household. It's what I've had to enforce with my young ladies at Ashcombe. No wonder poor dear Mr. Gibson has been displeased at his dinner not being ready, and he so hard-worked!"

"Papa doesn't care what he has, if it's only ready. He would take bread and cheese, if cook would only send it in instead of dinner."

"Bread and cheese! Does Mr. Gibson eat cheese?"

"Yes; he's very fond of it," said Molly, innocently. "I've known him eat toasted cheese when he has been too tired to fancy anything else."

"Oh! but, my dear, we must change all that. I shouldn't like to think of your father eating cheese; it's such a strong-smelling, coarse kind of thing. We must get him a cook who can toss him up an omelette, or something elegant. Cheese is only fit for the kitchen."

"Papa is very fond of it," persevered Molly.

"Oh! but we will cure him of that. I couldn't bear the smell of cheese; and I'm sure he would be sorry to annoy me."

Molly was silent; it did not do, she found, to be too minute in telling about her father's likes or dislikes. She had better leave them for Mrs. Kirkpatrick to find out for herself. It was an awkward pause; each was trying to find something agreeable to say. Molly spoke at length. "Please! I should so like to know something about Cynthia—your daughter."

"Yes, call her Cynthia. It's a pretty name, isn't it? Cynthia Kirkpatrick. Not so pretty, though, as my old name, Hyacinth

Clare. People used to say it suited me so well. I must show you an acrostic a gentleman—he was a lieutenant in the 53d—made upon it. Oh! we shall have a great deal to say to each other, I foresee!"

"But about Cynthia?"

"Oh, yes! about dear Cynthia. What do you want to know, my dear?"

"Papa said she was to live with us! When will she come?"

"Oh, was it not sweet of your kind father? I thought of nothing else but Cynthia's going out as a governess when she had completed her education; she has been brought up for it, and has had great advantages. But good dear Mr. Gibson wouldn't hear of it. He said yesterday that she must come and live with us when she left school."

"When will she leave school?"

"She went for two years. I don't think I must let her leave before next summer. She teaches English as well as learning French. Next summer she shall come home, and then shan't we be a happy little quartette?"

"I hope so," said Molly. "But she is to come to the wedding, isn't she?" she went on timidly, not knowing how far Mrs. Kirkpatrick would like the allusion to her marriage.

"Your father has begged for her to come; but we must think about it a little more before quite fixing it. The journey is a great expense!"

"Is she like you? I do so want to see her."

"She is very handsome, people say. In the bright-coloured style,—perhaps something like what I was. But I like the dark-haired foreign kind of beauty best—just now," touching Molly's hair, and looking at her with an expression of sentimental remembrance.

"Does Cynthia— is she very clever and accomplished?" asked Molly, a little afraid lest the answer should remove Miss Kirkpatrick at too great a distance from her.

"She ought to be; I've paid ever so much money to have her taught by the best masters. But you will see her before long, and I'm afraid we must go now to Lady Cumnor. It has been very charming having you all to myself, but I know Lady Cumnor will be expecting us now, and she was very curious to see you,—my future daughter, as she calls you."

Molly followed Mrs. Kirkpatrick into the morning-room, where Lady Cumnor was sitting—a little annoyed, because, having completed her toilette earlier than usual,



Clare had not been aware by instinct of the fact, and so had not brought Molly Gibson for inspection a quarter of an hour before. Every small occurrence is an event in the day of a convalescent invalid, and a little while ago Molly would have met with patronizing appreciation, where now she had to encounter criticism. Of Lady Cumnor's character as an individual she knew nothing; she only knew she was going to see and be seen by a live countess; nay, more, by "the countess" of Hollingford.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick led her into Lady Cumnor's presence by the hand, and in presenting her said,—"My dear little daughter, Lady Cumnor!"

"Now, Clare, don't let me have nonsense. She is not your daughter yet, and may never be,—I believe that one-third of the engagements I have heard of have never come to marriages. Miss Gibson, I am very glad to see you, for your father's sake; when I know you better, I hope it will be for your own."

Molly very heartily hoped that she might never be known any better by the stern-looking lady who sat so uprightly in the easy chair, prepared for lounging, and which therefore gave all the more effect to the stiff attitude. Lady Cumnor luckily took Molly's silence for acquiescent humility, and went on speaking after a further little pause of inspection.

"Yes, yes, I like her looks, Clare. You may make something of her. It will be a great advantage to you, my dear, to have a lady who has trained up several young people of quality always about you just at the time when you are growing up. I'll tell you what, Clare!"—a sudden thought striking her,—"you and she must become better acquainted—you know nothing of each other at present; you are not to be married till Christmas, and what could be better than that she should go back with you to Ashcombe! She would be with you constantly, and have the advantage of the companionship of your young people, which would be a good thing for an only child! It's a capital plan; I'm very glad I thought of it!"

Now it would be difficult to say which of Lady Cumnor's two hearers was the most dismayed at the idea which had taken possession of her. Mrs. Kirkpatrick had no fancy for being encumbered with a step-daughter before her time. If Molly came to be an inmate of her house, farewell to many little background economies, and a still more serious farewell to many little indulgences, that were innocent enough in themselves, but which Mrs. Kirkpatrick's former life had

caused her to look upon as sins to be concealed: the dirty dog's-eared delightful novel from the Ashcombe circulating library, the leaves of which she turned over with a pair of scissors; the lounging-chair which she had for use at her own home, straight and upright as she sat now in Lady Cumnor's presence; the dainty morsel, savoury and small, to which she treated herself for her own solitary supper,—all these and many other similarly pleasant things would have to be foregone if Molly came to be her pupil, parlour-boarder, or visitor, as Lady Cumnor was planning. One—two things Clare was instinctively resolved upon: to be married at Michaelmas, and not to have Molly at Ashcombe. But she smiled as sweetly as if the plan proposed was the most charming project in the world, while all the time her poor brains were beating about in every bush for the reasons or excuses of which she should make use at some future time. Molly, however, saved her all this trouble. It was a question which of the three was the most surprised by the words which burst out of her lips. She did not mean to speak, but her heart was very full, and almost before she was aware of her thought she heard herself saying,—

"I don't think it would be nice at all. I mean my lady, that I should dislike it very much; it would be taking me away from papa just these very few last months. I will like you," she went on, her eyes full of tears; and, turning to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, she put her hand into her future stepmother's with the prettiest and most trustful action. "I will try hard to love you, and to do all I can to make you happy; but you must not take me away from papa just this very last bit of time that I shall have him."

Mrs. Kirkpatrick fondled the hand thus placed in hers, and was grateful to the girl for her outspoken opposition to Lady Cumnor's plans. Clare was, however, exceedingly unwilling to back up Molly by any words of her own until Lady Cumnor had spoken and given the cue. But there was something in Molly's little speech, or in her straightforward manner, that amused instead of irritating Lady Cumnor in her present mood. Perhaps she was tired of the silkiness with which she had been shut up for so many days.

She put up her glasses, and looked at them both before speaking. Then she said—"Upon my word, young lady! Why, Clare, you've got your work before you! Not but what there is a good deal of truth in what she says. It must be very disagreeable to a girl of her age to have a step-

mother coming to see her father and herself, whatever may be the advantages to her in the long-run."

Molly almost felt as if she could make a friend of the stiff old countess, for her clearness of sight as to the plan proposed being a trial; but she was afraid, in her new-born desire of thinking for others, of Mrs. Kirkpatrick being hurt. She need not have feared as far as outward signs went, for the smile was still on that lady's pretty rosy lips, and the soft fondling of her hand never stopped. Lady Cumnor was more interested in Molly the more she looked at her; and her gaze was pretty steady through her gold-rimmed eye-glasses. She began a sort of catechism; a string of very straightforward questions, such as any lady under the rank of countess might have scrupled to ask, but which were not unkindly meant.

"You are sixteen, are you not?"

"No; I am seventeen. My birthday was three weeks ago."

"Very much the same thing, I should think. Have you ever been to school?"

"No, never! Miss Eyre has taught me everything I know."

"Umph! Miss Eyre was your governess, I suppose? I should not have thought your father could have afforded to keep a governess. But of course he must know his own affairs best."

"Certainly, my lady," replied Molly, a little touchy as to any reflection on her father's wisdom.

"You say 'certainly!' as if it was a matter of course that every one should know their own affairs best. You are very young, Miss Gibson—very. You'll know better before you come to my age. And I suppose you've been taught music, and the use of the globes, and French, and all the usual accomplishments, since you have had a governess? I never heard of such nonsense!" she went on, lashing herself up. "An only daughter! If there had been half-a-dozen girls, there might have been some sense in it."

Molly did not speak, but it was by a strong effort that she kept silence. Mrs. Kirkpatrick fondled her hand more perseveringly than ever, hoping thus to express a sufficient amount of sympathy to prevent her from saying anything injudicious. But the caress had become wearisome to Molly, and only irritated her nerves. She took her hand out of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's, with a slight manifestation of impatience.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the general peace that just at this moment Mr. Gibson

was announced. It is odd enough to see how the entrance of a person of the opposite sex into an assemblage of either men or women calms down the little discordances and the disturbance of mood. It was the case now; at Mr. Gibson's entrance my lady took off her glasses, and smoothed her brow; Mrs. Kirkpatrick managed to get up a very becoming blush; and as for Molly, her face glowed with delight, and the white teeth and pretty dimples came out like sunlight on a landscape.

Of course, after the first greeting, my lady had to have a private interview with her doctor; and Molly and her future step-mother wandered about in the gardens with their arms round each other's waists, or hand in hand, like two babes in the wood; Mrs. Kirkpatrick active in such endearments, Molly passive, and feeling within herself very shy and strange; for she had that particular kind of shy modesty which makes any one uncomfortable at receiving caresses from a person towards whom the heart does not go forth with an impulsive welcome.

Then came the early dinner; Lady Cumnor having hers in the quiet of her own room, to which she was still a prisoner. Once or twice during the meal, the idea crossed Molly's mind that her father disliked his position as a middle-aged lover being made so evident to the men in waiting as it was by Mrs. Kirkpatrick's affectionate speeches and innuendoes. He tried to banish every tint of pink sentimentalism from the conversation, and to confine it to matter of fact; and when Mrs. Kirkpatrick would persevere in dwelling upon such facts as had a bearing upon the future relationship of the parties, he insisted upon viewing them in the most matter-of-fact way; and this continued even after the men had left the room. An old rhyme Molly had heard Betty use would keep running in her head and making her uneasy,—

Two is company,  
Three is trumpery.

But where could she go in that strange house? What ought she to do? She was roused from this fit of wonder and abstraction by her father's saying, "What do you think of this plan of Lady Cumnor's? She says she was advising you to have Molly as a visitor at Ashcombe until we are married."

Mrs. Kirkpatrick's countenance fell. If only Molly would be so good as to testify again, as she had done before Lady Cumnor! But if the proposal was made by her father,

it would come to his daughter from a different quarter than it had done from a strange lady, be she ever so great. Molly did not say anything; she only looked pale, and wistful, and anxious. Mrs. Kirkpatrick had to speak for herself.

"It would be a charming plan, only — Well! we know why we had rather not have it, don't we, love? And we won't tell papa, for fear of making him vain. No! I think I must leave her with you, dear Mr. Gibson, for a tête-à-tête for these last few weeks. It would be cruel to take her away."

"But you know, my dear, I told you of the reason why it does not do to have Molly at home just at present," said Mr. Gibson eagerly.

For the more he knew of his future wife, the more he felt it necessary to remember that, with all her foibles, she would be able to stand between Molly and any such adventures as that which had occurred lately with Mr. Cox; so that one of the good reasons for the step he had taken was always present to him, while it had slipped off the smooth surface of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's mirror-like mind without leaving any impression. She now recalled it, on seeing Mr. Gibson's anxious face.

But what were Molly's feelings at these last words of her father's? She had been sent from home for some reason, kept a secret from her, but told to this strange woman. Was there to be perfect confidence between these two, and she to be forever shut out? Was she, and what concerned her — though how she did not know — to be discussed between them for the future, and she to be kept in the dark? A bitter pang of jealousy made her heart-sick. She might as well go to Ashcombe, or anywhere else, now. Thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself? Yet in this deadness lay her only comfort; or so it seemed. Wandering in such mazes, she hardly knew how the conversation went on; a third was indeed "trumpery," where there was entire confidence between the two who were company, from which the other was shut out. She was positively unhappy, and her father did not appear to see it; he was absorbed with his new plans and his new wife that was to be. But he did notice it, and was truly sorry for his little girl; only he thought that there was a greater chance for the future harmony of the household, if he did not lead Molly to define her present feelings by putting them into words. It was his general

plan to repress emotion by not showing the sympathy he felt. Yet, when he had to leave, he took Molly's hand in his, and held it there, in such a different manner to that in which Mrs. Kirkpatrick had done; and his voice softened to his child as he bade her good-by, and added the words (most unusual to him), "God bless you, child!"

Molly had held up all the day bravely; she had not shown anger, or repugnance, or annoyance, or regret; but when once more by herself in the Hamley carriage, she burst into a passion of tears, and cried her fill till she reached the village of Hamley. Then she tried in vain to smooth her face into smiles, and do away with the other signs of her grief. She only hoped she could run upstairs to her own room without notice, and bathe her eyes in cold water before she was seen. But at the hall-door she was caught by the squire and Roger coming in from an after-dinner stroll in the garden, and hospitably anxious to help her to alight. Roger saw the state of things in an instant, and saying —

"My mother has been looking for you to come back for this last hour," he led the way to the drawing-room. But Mrs. Hamley was not there; the squire had stopped to speak to the coachman about one of the horses; they two were alone. Roger said, —

"I am afraid you have had a very trying day. I have thought of you several times, for I know how awkward these new relations are."

"Thank you," said she, her lips trembling, and on the point of crying again. "I did try to remember what you said, and to think more of others, but it is so difficult sometimes; you know it is, don't you?"

"Yes," said he, gravely. He was gratified by her simple confession of having borne his words of advice in mind, and tried to act up to them. He was but a very young man, and he was honestly flattered; perhaps this led him on to offer more advice, and this time it was evidently mingled with sympathy. He did not want to draw out her confidence, which he felt might very easily be done with such a simple girl; but he wished to help her by giving her a few of the principles on which he had learnt to rely. "It is difficult," he went on, "but by-and-by you will be so much happier for it."

"No, I sha'n't!" said Molly, shaking her head. "It will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and live only in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as

well never have lived. And as for the happiness you speak of, I shall never be happy again."

"There was an unconscious depth in what she said, that Roger did not know how to answer at the moment; it was easier to address himself to the assertion of the girl of seventeen, that she should never be happy again.

"Nonsense: perhaps in ten years' time you will be looking back on this trial as a very light one—who knows?"

"I dare say it seems foolish; perhaps all our earthly trials will appear foolish to us after a while; perhaps they seem so now to angels. But we are ourselves, you know, and this is now, not some time to come, a long, long way off. And we are not angels, to be comforted by seeing the ends for which everything is sent."

She had never spoken so long a sentence to him before; and when she had said it, though she did not take her eyes away from his, as they stood steadily looking at each other, she blushed a little; she could not have told why. Nor did he tell himself why a sudden pleasure came over him as he gazed at her simple expressive face—and for a moment lost the sense of what she was saying, in the sensation of pity for her sad earnestness. In an instant more he was himself again. Only it is pleasant to the wisest, most reasonable youth of one or two and twenty to find himself looked up to as a Mentor by a girl of seventeen.

"I know, I understand. Yes: it is *now* we have to do with. Don't let us go into metaphysics." Molly opened her eyes wide at this. Had she been talking metaphysics without knowing it? "One looks forward to a mass of trials, which will only have to be encountered one by one, little by little. Oh, here is my mother! she will tell you better than I can."

And the *tête-à-tête* was merged in a trio. Mrs. Hamley lay down; she had not been well all day,—she had missed Molly, she said,—and now she wanted to hear of all the adventures that had occurred to the girl at the Towers. Molly sat on a stool close to the head of the sofa, and Roger, though at first he took up a book and tried to read that he might be no restraint, soon found his reading all a pretence: it was so inter-

esting to listen to Molly's little narrative, and, besides, if he could give her any help in her time of need, was it not his duty to make himself acquainted with all the circumstances of her case?

And so they went on during all the remaining time of Molly's stay at Hamley. Mrs. Hamley sympathized, and liked to hear details; as the French say, her sympathy was given *en détail*, the squire's *en gros*. He was very sorry for her evident grief, and almost felt guilty, as if he had had a share in bringing it about by the mention he had made of the possibility of Mr. Gibson's marrying again. When first Molly had come on her visit to them. He said to his wife more than once,—

"'Pon my word, now, I wish I'd never spoken those unlucky words that first day at dinner. Do you remember how she took them up? It was like a prophecy of what was to come, now, wasn't it? And she looked pale from that day, and I don't think she has ever fairly enjoyed her food since. I must take more care what I say for the future. Not but what Gibson is doing the very best thing, both for himself and her, that he can do. I told him so only yesterday. But I'm very sorry for the little girl, though. I wish I'd never spoken about it, that I do! but it was like a prophecy, wasn't it?"

Roger tried hard to find out a reasonable and right method of comfort, for he too, in his way, was sorry for the girl, who bravely struggled to be cheerful, in spite of her own private grief, for his mother's sake. He felt as if high principle and noble precept ought to perform an immediate work. But they do not, for there is always the unknown quantity of individual experience and feeling, which offer a tacit resistance, the amount incalculable by another, to all good counsel and high decree. But the bond between the Mentor and his Telemachus strengthened every day. He endeavoured to lead her out of morbid thought into interest in other than personal things; and, naturally enough, his own objects of interest came readiest to hand. She felt that he did her good, she did not know why or how; but after a talk with him, she always fancied that she had got the clue to goodness and peace, whatever befell.

## WIVES AND DAUGHTERS.

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### THE HALF-SISTERS.

It appeared as if Mrs. Gibson's predictions were likely to be verified; for Osborne Hamley found his way to her drawing-room pretty frequently. To be sure, sometimes prophets can help on the fulfilment of their own prophecies; and Mrs. Gibson was not passive.

Molly was altogether puzzled by his manners and ways. He spoke of occasional absence from the Hall, without exactly saying where he had been. But that was not her idea of the conduct of a married man, who, she imagined, ought to have a house and servants, and pay rent and taxes, and live with his wife. Who this mysterious wife might be, faded into insignificance before the wonder of where she was. London, Cambridge, Dover, nay, even France, were mentioned by him as places to which he had been on these different little journeys. These facts came out quite casually, almost as if he was unaware of what he was betraying; sometimes he dropped out such sentences as these:—"Ah, that would be the day I was crossing! It was stormy indeed! Instead of one being only two hours, we were nearly five." Or, "I met Lord Hollingford at Dover last week, and he said," &c. "The cold now is nothing to what it was in London on Thursday, the thermometer was down at 15°." Perhaps, in the rapid flow of conversation, these small revelations were noticed by no one but Molly, whose interest and curiosity were always hovering over the secret she had become possessed of, in spite of all her self-reproach for allowing her thoughts to dwell on what was still to be kept as a mystery.

It was also evident to her that Osborne was not too happy at home. He had lost the slight touch of cynicism which he had affected when he was expected to do wonders at college; and that was one good result of his failure. If he did not give himself the trouble of appreciating other people, and their performances, at any rate his conversation was not so amply sprinkled with critical pepper. He was more absent, not so agreeable, Mrs. Gibson thought, but did not say. He looked ill in health; but that might be the consequence of the real depression of spirits which Molly occasionally saw peeping out through all his pleasant surface-talk. Now and then, he referred to "the happy days that are gone," or "to the time when my mother was alive," when talking directly to her; and then his voice sank, and a gloom came over her countenance, and Molly long-

ed to express her own deep sympathy. He did not often mention his father; and Molly thought she could read in his manner, when he did, that something of the painful restraint she had noticed when she was last at the Hall still existed between them. Nearly all that she knew of the family interior she had heard from Mrs. Hamley, and she was uncertain as to how far her father was acquainted with them; so she did not like to question him too closely; nor was he a man to be so questioned as to the domestic affairs of his patients. Sometimes she wondered if it was a dream—that short half hour in the library at Hamley Hall—when she had learnt a fact which seemed so all-important to Osborne, yet which made so little difference in his way of life—either in speech or action. During the twelve or fourteen hours or so that she had remained at the Hall afterwards, no further allusion had been made to his marriage, either by himself or by Roger. It was, indeed, very like a dream. Probably Molly would have been rendered much more uncomfortable in the possession of her secret if Osborne had struck her as particularly attentive in his devotions to Cynthia. She evidently amused and attracted him, but not in any lively or passionate kind of manner. He admired her beauty, and seemed to feel her charm; but he would leave her side, and come to sit near Molly, if anything reminded him of his mother, about which he could talk to her, and to her alone. Yet he came so often to the Gibsons, that Mrs. Gibson might be excused for the fancy she had taken into her head, that it was for Cynthia's sake. He liked the lounge, the friendliness, the company of two intelligent girls of beauty and manners above the average; one of whom stood in a peculiar relation to him, as having been especially beloved by the mother whose memory he cherished so fondly. Knowing himself to be out of the category of bachelors, he was, perhaps, too indifferent as to other people's ignorance, and its possible consequences.

Somewhat, Molly did not like to be the first to introduce Roger's name into the conversation, so she lost many an opportunity of hearing intelligence about him. Osborne was often so languid or so absent that he only followed the lead of talk; and as an awkward fellow, who had paid her no particular attention, and as a second son, Roger was not pre-eminent in Mrs. Gibson's thoughts; Cynthia had never seen him, and the freak did not take her often to speak about him. He had not come home since he had obtained his high place in the math-

emotional lists: that Molly knew; and she knew, too, that he was working hard for something—she supposed a fellowship—and that was all. Osborne's tone in speaking of him was always the same: every word, every inflexion of the voice breathed out affection and respect—nay, even admiration! And this from the *nil admirari* brother, who seldom carried his exertions so far.

"Ah, Roger!" he said one day. Molly caught the name in an instant, though she had not heard what had gone before. "He is a fellow in a thousand—in a thousand, indeed! I don't believe there is his match anywhere for goodness and real solid power combined."

"Molly," said Cynthia, after Mr. Osborne Hamley had gone, "what sort of a man is this Roger Hamley? One can't tell how much to believe of his brother's praises; for it is the one subject on which Osborne Hamley becomes enthusiastic. I've noticed it once or twice before."

While Molly hesitated on which point of the large round to begin her description, Mrs. Gibson struck in,—

"It just shows what a sweet disposition Osborne Hamley is of—that he should praise his brother as he does. I daresay he is senior wrangler, and much good may it do him! I don't deny that; but as for conversation, he's as heavy as heavy can be. A great awkward fellow to boot, who looks as if he did not know two and two made four, for all he is such a mathematical genius. You would hardly believe that he was Osborne Hamley's brother to see him! I should not think he had a profile at all."

"What do you think of him, Molly?" said the persevering Cynthia.

"I like him," said Molly. "He has been very kind to me. I know he isn't handsome like Osborne."

It was rather difficult to say all this quietly, but Molly managed to do it, quite aware that Cynthia would not rest till she had extracted some kind of an opinion out of her.

"I suppose he will come home at Easter," said Cynthia, "and then I shall see him for myself."

"It's a great pity that their being in mourning will prevent their going to the Easter charity ball," said Mrs. Gibson, plaintively. "I shan't like to take you two girls, if you are not to have any partners. It will put me in such an awkward position. I wish we could join on to the Towers party. That would secure you partners, for they always bring a number of dancing men, who might dance with you after they had done their duty by the ladies of the house. But really

everything is so changed since dear Lady Cumnor has been an invalid that perhaps they won't go at all."

This Easter ball was a great subject of conversation with Mrs. Gibson. She sometimes spoke of it as her first appearance in society as a bride, though she had been visiting once or twice a week all winter long. Then she shifted her ground, and said she felt so much interest in it, because she would then have the responsibility of introducing both her own and Mr. Gibson's daughter to public notice, though the fact was that pretty nearly every one who was going to this ball had seen the two young ladies—though not their ball dresses—before. But, aping the manners of the aristocracy as far as she knew them, she intended to "bring out" Molly and Cynthia on this occasion, which she regarded in something of the light of a presentation at Court. "They are not out yet," was her favourite excuse when either of them was invited to any house to which she did not wish them to go, or invited without her. She even made a difficulty about their "not being out" when Miss Browning—that old friend of the Gibson family—came in one morning to ask the two girls to come to a very friendly tea and a round game afterwards; this mild piece of gaiety being designed as an attention to three of Mrs. Goodenough's grandchildren—two young ladies and their school-boy brother—who were staying on a visit to their grandmamma.

"You are very kind, Miss Browning, but you see I hardly like to let them go—they are not out, you know, till after the Easter ball."

"Till when we are invisible," said Cynthia, always ready with her mockery to exaggerate any pretension of her mother's. "We are so high in rank that our sovereign must give us her sanction before we can play a round game at your house."

Cynthia enjoyed the idea of her own full-grown size and stately gait, as contrasted with that of a meek, half-fledged girl in the nursery; but Miss Browning was half puzzled and half affronted.

"I don't understand it at all. In my days girls went wherever it pleased people to ask them, without this farce of bursting out in all their new fine clothes at some public place. I don't mean but what the gentry took their daughters to York, or Matlock, or Bath, to give them a taste of gay society when they were growing up; and the quality went up to London, and their young ladies were presented to Queen Charlotte, and went to a birthday ball, per-

haps. But for us little Hollingsford people, why we knew every child amongst us from the day of its birth; and many a girl of twelve or fourteen have I seen go out to a card-party, and sit quiet at her work, and know how to behave as well as any lady there. 'There was no talk of 'coming out' in those days for any one under the daughter of a squire."

"After Easter, Molly and I shall know how to behave at a card-party, but not before," said Cynthia, demurely.

"You're always fond of your quips and your cranks, my dear," said Miss Browning, "and I wouldn't quite answer for your behaviour: you sometimes let your spirits carry you away. But I'm quite sure Molly will be a little lady as she always is, and always was, and I have known her from a babe."

Mrs. Gibson took up arms on behalf of her own daughter, or rather she took up arms against Molly's praises.

"I don't think you would have called Molly a lady the other day, Miss Browning, if you had found her where I did: sitting up in a cherry-tree, six feet from the ground at least, I do assure you."

"Oh! but that wasn't pretty," said Miss Browning, shaking her head at Molly. "I thought you'd left off those tomboy ways."

"She wants the refinement which good society gives in several ways," said Mrs. Gibson, returning to the attack on poor Molly. "She's very apt to come up stairs two steps at a time."

"Only two, Molly!" said Cynthia. "Why, to-day I found I could manage four of these broad shallow steps."

"My dear child, what are you saying?"

"Only confessing that I, like Molly, want the refinements that good society gives; therefore, please do let us go to Miss Brownings' this evening. I will pledge myself for Molly that she shan't sit in a cherry-tree; and Molly shall see that I don't go up stairs in an unladylike way. I will go up stairs as meekly as if I were a come-out young lady, and had been to the Easter ball."

So it was agreed that they should go. If Mr. Osborne Hamley had been named as one of the probable visitors, there would have been none of this difficulty about the affair.

But though he was not there, his brother Roger was. Molly saw him in a minute when she entered the little drawing-room; but Cynthia did not.

"And see, my dears," said Miss Phœbe Browning, turning them round to the side where Roger stood waiting for his turn of

speaking to Molly. "We've got a gentleman for you after all! Wasn't it fortunate? — just as sister said that you might find it dull — you, Cynthia, she meant, because you know you come from France; and then, just as if he had been sent from heaven, Mr. Roger came in to call; and I won't say we laid violent hands on him, because he was too good for that; but really we should have been near it, if he had not stayed of his own accord."

The moment Roger had done his cordial greeting to Molly, he asked her to introduce him to Cynthia.

"I want to know her — your new sister," he added, with the kind smile Molly remembered so well since the very first day she had seen it directed towards her, as she sat crying under the weeping ash. Cynthia was standing a little behind Molly when Roger asked for this introduction. She was generally dressed with careless grace. Molly, who was delicate neatness itself, used sometimes to wonder how Cynthia's tumbled gowns, tossed away so untidily, had the art of looking so well and falling in such graceful folds. For instance, the pale lilac muslin gown she wore this evening had been worn many times before, and had looked unfit to wear again until Cynthia put it on. Then the limpness became softness, and the very creases took the lines of beauty. Molly, in a daintily clean pink muslin, did not look half so elegantly dressed as Cynthia. The grave eyes that the latter raised when she had to be presented to Roger had a sort of child-like innocence and wonder about them, which did not quite belong to Cynthia's character. She put on her armour of magic that evening — involuntarily as she always did; but, on the other side, she could not help trying her power on strangers. Molly had always felt that she should have a right to a good long talk with Roger when she next saw him; and that he would tell her, or she should gather from him, all the details she so longed to hear about the squire — about the Hall — about Osborne — about himself. He was just as cordial and friendly as ever with her. If Cynthia had not been there, all would have gone on as she had anticipated; but of all the victims to Cynthia's charms he fell most prone and abject. Molly saw it all, as she was sitting next to Miss Phœbe at the tea-table, acting right-hand, and passing cake, cream, sugar, with such busy assiduity that every one besides herself thought that her mind, as well as her hands, was fully occupied. She tried to talk to the two shy girls, as in virtue of her two years' se-

morality she thought herself bound to do; and the consequence was, she went up stairs with the twain clinging to her arms, and willing to swear an eternal friendship. Nothing would satisfy them but that she must sit between them at vingt-un; and they were so desirous of her advice in the important point of fixing the price of the counters, that she could not ever have joined in the animated tête-à-tête going on between Roger and Cynthia. Or rather, it would be more correct to say that Roger was talking in a most animated manner to Cynthia, whose sweet eyes were fixed upon his face with a look of great interest in all he was saying, while it was only now and then she made her low replies. Molly caught a few words occasionally in intervals of business.

"At my uncle's, we always give a silver threepence for three dozen. You know what a silver threepence is, don't you, dear Miss Gibson?"

"The three classes are published in the Senate House at nine o'clock on the Friday morning, and you can't imagine"—

"I think it will be thought rather shabby to play at anything less than sixpence. That gentleman" (this in a whisper) "is at Cambridge, and you know they always play very high there, and sometimes ruin themselves, don't they, dear Miss Gibson?"

"Oh, on this occasion the Master of Arts who precedes the candidates for honours when they go into the Senate House is called the Father of the College to which he belongs. I think I mentioned that before, didn't I?"

So Cynthia was hearing all about Cambridge, and the very examination about which Molly had felt such keen interest, without having ever been able to have her questions answered by a competent person; and Roger, to whom she had always looked as the final and most satisfactory answerer, was telling all she wanted to know, and she could not listen. It took all her patience to make up little packets of counters, and settle, as the arbiter of the game, whether it would be better for the round or the oblong counters to be reckoned as six. And when all was done, and every one sate in their places round the table, Roger and Cynthia had to be called twice before they came. They stood up, it is true, at the first sound of their names; but they did not move: Roger went on talking, Cynthia listening, till the second call—when they hurried to the table and tried to appear all on a sudden quite interested in the great questions of the game, namely, the price of three dozen counters, and whether, all things con-

sidered, it would be better to call the round counters or the oblong half-a-dozen each. Miss Browning, drumming the pack of cards on the table, and quite ready to begin dealing, decided the matter by saying, "Rounds are sixes, and three dozen counters cost sixpence. Pay up, if you please, and let us begin at once." Cynthia sate between Roger and William Osborne, the young schoolboy, who bitterly resented on this occasion his sister's habit of calling him "Willie," as he thought that it was this boyish sobriquet which prevented Cynthia from attending as much to him as to Mr. Roger Hamley; he also was charmed by the charmer, who found leisure to give him one or two of her sweet smiles. On his return home to his grandmamma's he gave out one or two very decided and rather original opinions, quite opposed—as was natural—to his sister's. One was—

"That, after all, a senior wrangler was no great shakes. Any man might be one if he liked, but there were a lot of fellows that he knew who would be very sorry to go in for anything so slow."

Molly thought the game never would end. She had no particular turn for gambling in her; and whatever her card might be, she regularly put on two counters, indifferent as to whether she won or lost. Cynthia, on the contrary, staked high, and was at one time very rich, but ended by being in debt to Molly something like six shillings. She had forgotten her purse, she said, and was obliged to borrow from the more provident Molly, who was aware that the round game of which Miss Browning had spoken to her was likely to require money. If it was not a very merry affair for all the individuals concerned, it was a very noisy one on the whole. Molly thought it was going to last till midnight; but punctually as the clock struck nine, the little maid-servant staggered in under the weight of a tray loaded with sandwiches, cakes, and jelly. This brought on a general move; and Roger, who appeared to have been on the watch for something of the kind, came and took a chair by Molly.

"I am so glad to see you again—it seems such a long time since Christmas," said he, dropping his voice, and not alluding more exactly to the day when she had left the Hall.

"It is a long time," she replied; "we are close to Easter now. I have so wanted to tell you how glad I was to hear about your honours at Cambridge. I once thought of sending you a message through your brother, but then I thought it might be mak-



ing too much fuss, because I know nothing of mathematics, or of the value of a senior-wrangler'ship; and you were sure to have so many congratulations from people who did know."

"I missed yours though, Molly," said he, kindly. "But I felt sure you were glad for me."

"Glad and proud too," said she. "I should so like to hear something more about it. I heard you telling Cynthia" —

"Yes. What a charming person she is! I should think you must be happier than we expected long ago."

"But tell me something about the senior-wrangler'ship, please," said Molly.

"It's a long story, and I ought to be helping the Miss Brownings to hand sandwiches — besides, you wouldn't find it very interesting, it's so full of technical details."

"Cynthia looked very much interested," said Molly.

"Well! then I refer you to her, for I must go now. I can't for shame go on sitting here, and letting those good ladies have all the trouble. But I shall come and call on Mrs. Gibson soon. Are you walking home to-night?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Molly, eagerly foreseeing what was to come.

"Then I shall walk home with you. I left my horse at the 'Angel,' and that's half-way. I suppose old Betty will allow me to accompany you and your sister? you used to describe her as something of a dragon."

"Betty has left us," said Molly, sadly. "She's gone to live at a place at Ashcombe."

He made a face of dismay, and then went off to his duties. The short conversation had been very pleasant, and his manner had had just the brotherly kindness of old times; but it was not quite the manner he had to Cynthia; and Molly half thought she would have preferred the latter. He was now hovering about Cynthia, who had declined the offer of refreshments from Willie Osborne. Roger was tempting her, and with playful entreaties urging her to take something from him. Every word they said could be heard by the whole room; yet every word was said, on Roger's part at least, as if he could not have spoken it in that peculiar manner to any one else. At length, and rather more because she was weary of being entreated than because it was his wish, Cynthia took a macaroon, and Roger seemed as happy as though she had crowned him with flowers. The whole affair was as trifling and commonplace as it could be in itself; hardly worth noticing: and yet Molly did notice

it, and felt uneasy; she could not tell why. As it turned out, it was a rainy night, and Mrs. Gibson sent a fly for the two girls, instead of old Betty's substitute. Both Cynthia and Molly thought of the possibility of their taking the two Osborne girls back to their grandmother's, and so saving them a wet walk; but Cynthia got the start in speaking about it; and the thanks and the implied praise for thoughtfulness were hers.

When they got home Mr. and Mrs. Gibson were sitting in the drawing-room, quite ready to be amused by any details of the evening.

Cynthia began, —

"Oh! it wasn't very entertaining. One didn't expect that," and she yawned wearily.

"Who were there?" asked Mr. Gibson.

"Quite a young party — wasn't it?"

"They'd only asked Lizzie and Fanny Osborne, and their brother; but Mr. Roger Hamley had ridden over and called on the Miss Brownings, and they had kept him to tea. No one else."

"Roger Hamley there?" said Mr. Gibson. "He's come home then. I must make time to ride over and see him."

"You'd much better ask him here," said Mrs. Gibson. "Suppose you invite him and his brother to dine here on Friday, my dear? It would be a very pretty attention, I think."

"My dear! these young Cambridge men have a very good taste in wine, and don't spare it. My cellar won't stand many of their attacks."

"I didn't think you were so inhospitable, Mr. Gibson."

"I'm not inhospitable, I'm sure. If you'll put 'bitter beer' in the corner of your notes of invitation, just as the smart people put 'quadrilles' as a sign of the entertainment offered, we'll have Osborne and Roger to dinner any day you like. And what did you think of my favourite, Cynthia? You hadn't seen him before, I think?"

Oh! he's nothing like so handsome as his brother; nor so polished; nor so easy to talk to. He entertained me for more than an hour with a long account of some examination or other; but there's something one likes about him."

"Well — and Molly" — said Mrs. Gibson, who piqued herself on being an impartial stepmother; and who always tried hard to make Molly talk as much as Cynthia — "what sort of an evening have you had?"

"Very pleasant, thank you." Her heart a little belied her as she said this. She had not cared for the round game; and she

would have cared for Roger's conversation. She had had what she was indifferent to, and not had what she would have liked.

"We've had our unexpected visitor, too," said Mr. Gibson. "Just after dinner, who should come in but Mr. Preston. I fancy he's having more of the management of the Hollingford property than formerly. Sheepshanks is getting an old man. And if so, I suspect we shall see a good deal of Preston. He's 'no blate,' as they used to say in Scotland, and made himself quite at home to-night. If I'd ask him to stay, or, indeed, if I'd done anything but yawn, he'd have been here now. But I defy any man to stay when I have a fit of yawning."

"Do you like Mr. Preston, papa?" asked Molly.

"About as much as I do half the men I meet. He talks well, and has seen a good deal. I know very little of him, though, except that he's my lord's steward, which is a guarantee for a good deal."

"Lady Harriet spoke pretty strongly against him that day I was with her at the Manor-house."

"Lady Harriet's always full of fancies: she likes persons to-day, and dislikes them to-morrow," said Mrs. Gibson, who was touched on her sore point, whenever Molly quoted Lady Harriet, or said anything to imply ever so transitory an intimacy with her.

"You must know a good deal about Mr. Preston, my dear? I suppose you saw a good deal of him at Ashecombe?"

Mrs. Gibson coloured, and looked at Cynthia before she replied. Cynthia's face was set into a determination not to speak, however much she might be referred to.

"Yes; we saw a good deal of him—at one time, I mean. He's changeable, I think, but he always sent us game, and sometimes fruit. There were some stories against him, but I never believed them."

"What kind of stories?" said Mr. Gibson, quickly.

"Oh, vague stories, you know: scandal, I dare say. No one ever believed them. He could be so agreeable if he chose; and my lord, who is so very particular, would never have kept him as agent if they were true; not that I ever knew what they were, for I consider all scandal as abominable gossip."

"I am very glad I yawned in his face," said Mr. Gibson. "I hope he'll take the hint."

"If it was one of your giant-gapes, papa, I should call it more than a hint," said Molly. "And if you want a yawning chorus

the next time he comes, I'll join in; won't you, Cynthia?"

"I don't know," replied the latter, shortly, as she lighted her bed-candle. The two girls had usually some nightly conversation in one or other of their bed-rooms; but to-night Cynthia said something or other about being terribly tired, and hastily shut her door.

The very next day, Roger came to pay his promised call. Molly was out in the garden with Williams, planning the arrangement of some new flower-beds, and deep in her employment of placing pegs upon the lawn to mark out the different situations, when, standing up to mark the effect, her eye was caught by the figure of a gentleman, sitting with his back to the light, leaning forward, and talking, or listening, eagerly. Molly knew the shape of the head perfectly, and hastily began to put off her brown-holland gardening apron, emptying the pockets as she spoke to Williams.

"You can finish it now, I think," said she. "You know about the bright-coloured flowers being against the privet-hedge, and where the new rose-bed is to be?"

"I can't justly say as I do," said he. "Mebbe you'll just go o'er it all once again, Miss Molly. I'm not so young as I onces was, and my head is not so clear now-a-days, and I'd be loth to make mistakes when you're so set upon your plans."

Molly gave up her impulse in a moment. She saw that the old gardener was really perplexed, yet that he was as anxious as he could be to do his best. So she went over the ground again, pegging and explaining till the wrinkled brow was smooth again, and he kept saying, "I see, miss. All right, Miss Molly, I've gotten it in my head as clear as patchwork now."

So she could leave him, and go in. But just as she was close to the garden door, Roger came out. It really was for once a case of virtue its own reward, for it was far pleasanter to her to have him in a tête-à-tête, however short, than in the restraint of Mrs. Gibson's and Cynthia's presence.

"I only just found out where you were, Molly. Mrs. Gibson said you had gone out, but she didn't know where; and it was the greatest chance that I turned round and saw you."

"I saw you some time ago, but I couldn't leave Williams. I think he was unusually slow to-day; and he seemed as if he couldn't understand my plan for the new flower-beds."

"Is that the paper you've got in your hand? Let me look at it, will you? Ah,

I see! you've borrowed some of your ideas from our garden at home, haven't you? This bed of scarlet geraniums, with the border of young oaks, pegged down! That was a fancy of my dear mother's."

They were both silent for a minute or two. Then Molly said, —

"How is the squire? I've never seen him since."

"No, he told me how much he wanted to see you, but he couldn't make up his mind to come and call. I suppose it would never do now for you to come and stay at the Hall, would it? It would give my father so much pleasure: he looks upon you as a daughter, and I'm sure both Osborne and I shall always consider you are like a sister to us, after all my mother's love for you, and your tender care of her at last. But I suppose it wouldn't do."

"No! certainly not," said Molly, hastily.

"I fancy if you could come it would put us a little to rights. You know, as I think I once told you, Osborne has behaved differently to what I should have done, though not wrongly, — only what I call an error of judgment. But my father, I'm sure, has taken up some notion of — never mind; only the end of it is that he holds Osborne still in tacit disgrace, and is miserable himself all the time. Osborne, too, is sore and unhappy, and estranged from my father. It is just what my mother would have put right very soon, and perhaps you could have done it — unconsciously, I mean — for this wretched mystery that Osborne preserves about his affairs is at the root of it all. But there's no use talking about it; I don't know why I began." Then, with a wrench, changing the subject, while Molly still thought of what he had been telling her, he broke out, — "I can't tell you how much I like Miss Kirkpatrick, Molly. It must be a great pleasure to you having such a companion!"

"Yes," said Molly, half smiling. "I'm very fond of her; and I think I like her better every day I know her. But how quickly you have found out her virtues!"

"I didn't say 'virtues,' did I?" asked he, reddening, but putting the question in all good faith. "Yet I don't think one could be deceived in that face. And Mrs. Gibson appears to be a very friendly person, — she has asked Osborne and me to dine here on Friday."

"Bitter beer" came into Molly's mind; but what she said was, "And are you coming?"

"Certainly I am, unless my father wants me; and I've given Mrs. Gibson a conditional promise for Osborne too. So I

shall see you all very soon again. But I must go now. I have to keep an appointment seven miles from here in half an hour's time. Good luck to your flower-garden, Molly."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE OLD SQUIRE'S TROUBLES.

AFFAIRS were going on worse at the Hall than Roger had liked to tell. Moreover, very much of the discomfort there arose from "mere manner," as people express it, which is always indescribable and indefinable. Quiet and passive as Mrs. Hamley had always been in appearance, she was the ruling spirit of the house as long as she lived. The directions to the servants, down to the most minute particulars, came from her sitting-room, or from the sofa on which she lay. Her children always knew where to find her; and to find her, was to find love and sympathy. Her husband, who was often restless and angry from one cause or another, always came to her to be smoothed down and put right. He was conscious of her pleasant influence over him, and became at peace with himself when in her presence; just as a child is at ease when with some one who is both firm and gentle. But the keystone of the family arch was gone, and the stones of which it was composed began to fall apart. It is always sad when a sorrow of this kind seems to injure the character of the mourning survivors. Yet, perhaps, this injury may be only temporary or superficial; the judgments so constantly passed upon the way people bear the loss of those whom they have deeply loved appear to be even more cruel, and wrongly meted out, than human judgments generally are. To careless observers, for instance, it would seem as though the squire was rendered more capricious and exacting, more passionate and authoritative, by his wife's death. The truth was, that it occurred at a time when many things came to harass him, and some to bitterly disappoint him; and *she* was no longer there to whom he used to carry his sore heart for the gentle balm of her sweet words, if the sore heart ached and smarted intensely; and often, when he saw how his violent conduct affected others, he could have cried out for their pity, instead of their anger and resentment: "Have mercy upon me, for I am very miserable." How often have such dumb thoughts gone up from the hearts of those who have taken

hold of their sorrow by the wrong end, as prayers against sin! And when the squire saw that his servants were learning to dread him, and his first-born to avoid him, he did not blame them. He knew he was becoming a domestic tyrant; it seemed as if all circumstances conspired against him, and as if he was too weak to struggle with them; else, why did everything in-doors and out-of-doors go so wrong just now, when all he could have done, had things been prosperous, was to have submitted, in very imperfect patience, to the loss of his wife? But just when he needed ready money to pacify Osborne's creditors, the harvest had turned out remarkably plentiful, and the price of corn had sunk down to a level it had not touched for years. The squire had insured his life at the time of his marriage for a pretty large sum. It was to be a provision for his wife, if she had survived him, and for their younger children. Roger was the only representative of these interests now; but the squire was unwilling to lose the insurance by ceasing to pay the annual sum. He would not, if he could, have sold any part of the estate which he inherited from his father; and, besides, it was strictly entailed. He had sometimes thought how wise a step it would have been could he have sold a portion of it, and with the purchase-money have drained and reclaimed the remainder; and at length, learning from some neighbour that Government would make certain advances for drainage, &c., at a very low rate of interest, on condition that the work was done, and the money repaid, within a given time, his wife had urged him to take advantage of the proffered loan. But now that she was no longer here to encourage him, and take an interest in the progress of the work, he grew indifferent to it himself, and cared no more to go out on his stout roan cob, and sit square on his seat, watching the labourers on the marshy land all overgrown with rushes; speaking to them from time to time in their own strong nervous country dialect: but the interest to Government had to be paid all the same, whether the men worked well or ill. Then the roof of the Hall let in the melted snow-water this winter; and, on examination, it turned out that a new roof was absolutely required. The men who had come about the advances made to Osborne by the London money-lender had spoken disparagingly of the timber on the estate—"Very fine trees—sound, perhaps, too, fifty years ago, but gone to rot now; had wanted lopping and clearing. Was there no wood-

ranger or forester? They were nothing like the value young Mr. Hamley had represented them to be of." The remarks had come round to the squire's ears. He loved the trees he had played under as a boy as if they were living creatures; that was on the romantic side of his nature. Merely looking at them as representing so many pounds sterling, he had esteemed them highly, and had had, until now, no opinion of another by which to correct his own judgment. So these words of the valuers cut him sharp, although he affected to disbelieve them, and tried to persuade himself that he did so. But, after all, these cares and disappointments did not touch the root of his deep resentment against Osborne. There is nothing like wounded affection for giving poignancy to anger. And the squire believed that Osborne and his advisers had been making calculations, based upon his, own death. He hated the idea so much—it made him so miserable—that he would not face it, and define it, and meet it with full inquiry and investigation. He chose rather to cherish the morbid fancy that he was useless in this world—born under an unlucky star—that all things went badly under his management. But he did not become humble in consequence. He put his misfortunes down to the score of Fate—not to his own; and he imagined that Osborne saw his failures, and that his first-born grudged him his natural term of life. All these fancies would have been set to rights could he have talked them over with his wife, or even had he been accustomed to mingle much in the society of those whom he esteemed his equals; but, as has been stated, he was inferior in education to those who should have been his mates; and perhaps the jealousy and *mauvaise honte* that this inferiority had called out long ago extended itself in some measure to the feelings he entertained towards his sons—less to Roger than to Osborne, though the former was turning out by far the most distinguished man. But Roger was practical; interested in all out-of-door things; and he enjoyed the details, homely enough, which his father sometimes gave him of the everyday occurrences which the latter had noticed in the woods and the fields. Osborne, on the contrary, was what is commonly called "fine;" delicate almost to effeminacy in dress and in manner; careful in small observances. All this his father had been rather proud of in the days when he had looked forward to a brilliant career at Cambridge for his son; he had at that time re-

garded Osborne's fastidiousness and elegance as another stepping-stone to the high and prosperous marriage which was to restore the ancient fortunes of the Hamley family. But now that Osborne had barely obtained his degree; that all the boastings of his father had proved vain; that the fastidiousness had led to unexpected expenses (to attribute the most innocent cause to Osborne's debts), the poor young man's ways and manners became a subject of irritation to his father. Osborne was still occupied with his books and his writings when he was at home; and this mode of passing the greater part of the day gave him but few subjects in common with his father when they did meet at meal-times, or in the evenings. Perhaps if Osborne had been able to have more out-of-door amusements it would have been better; but he was short-sighted, and cared little for the carefully-observant pursuits of his brother: he knew but few young men of his own standing in the county; his hunting even, of which he was passionately fond, had been curtailed this season, as his father had disposed of one of the two hunters he had been hitherto allowed. The whole stable establishment had been reduced; perhaps because it was the economy which told most on the enjoyment of both the squire and Osborne, and which, therefore, the former took a savage pleasure in enforcing. The old carriage—a heavy family coach bought in the days of comparative prosperity—was no longer needed after madam's death, and fell to pieces in the cobwebbed seclusion of the coach-house. The best of the two carriage-horses was taken for a gig, which the squire now set up; saying many a time to all who might care to listen to him, that it was the first time for generations that the Hamleys of Hamley had not been able to keep their own coach. The other carriage-horse was turned out to grass; being too old for regular work. Conqueror used to come whinnying up to the park palings whenever he saw the squire, who had always a piece of bread, or some sugar, or an apple, for the old favourite—and made many a complaining speech to the dumb animal, telling him of the change of times since both were in their prime. It had never been the squire's custom to encourage his boys to invite their friends to the Hall. Perhaps this, too, was owing to his *mauvaise honte*, and also to an exaggerated consciousness of the deficiencies of his establishment as compared with what he imagined these lads were accustomed to at home. He explained

this once or twice to Osborne and Roger when they were at Rugby.

"You see, all you public schoolboys have a kind of freemasonry of your own, and outsiders are looked on by you much as I look on rabbits and all that isn't game. Ay, you may laugh, but it is so; and your friends will throw their eyes askance at me, and never think on my pedigree, which would beat theirs all to shivers, I'll be bound. No: I'll have no one here at the Hall who will look down on a Hamley of Hamley, even if he only knows how to make a cross instead of write his name."

Then, of course, they must not visit at houses to whose sons the squire could not or would not return a like hospitality. On all these points Mrs. Hamley had used her utmost influence without avail; his prejudices were immovable. As regarded his position as head of the oldest family in three counties, his pride was invincible; as regarded himself personally—ill at ease in the society of his equals, deficient in manners and in education—his morbid sensitiveness was too sore and too self-conscious to be called humility.

Take one instance from among many similar scenes of the state of feeling between the squire and his eldest son, which, if it could not be called active discord, showed at least passive estrangement.

It took place on an evening in the March succeeding Mrs. Hamley's death. Roger was at Cambridge. Osborne had also been from home, and he had not volunteered any information as to his absence. The squire believed that Osborne had been either in Cambridge with his brother, or in London; he would have liked to hear where his son had been, what he had been doing, and whom he had seen, precisely as pieces of news, and as some diversion from the domestic worries and cares which were pressing him hard; but he was too proud to ask any questions, and Osborne had not given him any details of his journey. This silence had aggravated the squire's internal dissatisfaction, and he came home to dinner weary and sore-hearted a day or two after Osborne's return. It was just six o'clock, and he went hastily into his own little business-room on the ground-floor, and, after washing his hands, came into the drawing-room feeling as if he were very late, but the room was empty. He glanced at the clock over the mantelpiece, as he tried to warm his hands at the fire. The fire had been neglected, and had gone out during the day; it was now piled up with half-dried wood, which sputtered and smoked

instead of doing its duty in blazing and warming the room, through which the keen wind was cutting its way in all directions. The clock had stopped, no one had remembered to wind it up, but by the squire's watch it was already past dinner-time. The old butler put his head into the room, but, seeing the squire alone, he was about to draw it back, and wait for Mr. Osborne, before announcing dinner. He had hoped to do this unperceived, but the squire caught him in the act.

"Why isn't dinner ready?" he called out sharply. "It's ten minutes past six. And, pray, why are you using this wood? It's impossible to get one's self warm by such a fire as this."

"I believe, sir, that 'Thomas' —

"Don't talk to me of Thomas. Send dinner in directly."

About five minutes elapsed, spent by the hungry squire in all sorts of impatient ways — attacking Thomas, who came in to look after the fire; knocking the logs about, scattering out sparks, but considerably lessening the chances of warmth; touching up the candles, which appeared to him to give a light unusually insufficient for the large cold room. While he was doing this, Osborne came in dressed in full evening dress. He always moved slowly; and this, to begin with, irritated the squire. Then an uncomfortable consciousness of a black coat, drab trousers, checked cotton cravat, and splashed boots, forced itself upon him as he saw Osborne's point-device costume. He chose to consider it afflictation and finery in Osborne, and was on the point of bursting out with some remark, when the butler, who had watched Osborne down-stairs before making the announcement, came in to say that dinner was ready.

"It surely isn't six o'clock?" said Osborne, pulling out his dainty little watch. He was scarcely more aware than it of the storm that was brewing.

"Six o'clock! It's more than a quarter past," growled out his father.

"I fancy your watch must be wrong, sir. I set mine by the Horse Guards only two days ago."

Now, imagining that old steady, turnip-shaped watch of the squire's was one of the insults which, as it could not reasonably be resented, was not to be forgiven. That watch had been given him by his father when watches were watches long ago. It had given the law to house-clocks, stable-clocks, kitchen-clocks, — nay, even to Hamley Church clock in its day; and was it now, in its respectable old age, to be looked down

upon by a little whipper-snapper of a French watch which could go into a man's waistcoat pocket, instead of having to be extricated, with due efforts, like a respectable watch of size and position, from a fob in the waistband. No! not if the whipper-snapper were backed by all the Horse Guards that ever were, with the Life Guards to boot. Poor Osborne might have known better than to cast this slur on his father's flesh and blood; for so dear did he hold his watch!

"My watch is like myself," said the squire, 'girling,' as the Scotch say — "plain, but steady-going. At any rate, it gives the law in my house. The King may go by the Horse Guards if he likes."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Osborne, really anxious to keep the peace; "I went by my watch, which is certainly right by London time; and I'd no idea you were waiting for me; otherwise I could have dressed much quicker."

"I should think so," said the squire, looking sarcastically at his son's attire. "When I was a young man, I should have been ashamed to have spent as much time at my looking-glass as if I'd been a girl. I could make myself as smart as any one when I was going to a dance, or to a party where I was likely to meet pretty girls; but I should have laughed myself to scorn if I'd stood fiddle-faddling at a glass, smirking at my own likeness, all for my own pleasure."

Osborne reddened, and was on the point of letting fly some caustic remark on his father's dress at the present moment; but he contented himself with saying, in a low voice, —

"My mother always expected us all to dress for dinner. I got into the habit of doing it to please her, and I keep it up now." Indeed, he had a certain kind of feeling of loyalty to her memory in keeping up all the little domestic habits and customs she had instituted or preferred. But the contrast which the squire thought was implied by Osborne's remark put him beside himself.

"And I, too, try to attend to her wishes. I do: and in more important things. I did when she was alive; and I do so now."

"I never said you did not," said Osborne, astonished at his father's passionate words and manner.

"Yes, you did, sir. You meant it. I could see by your looks. I saw you look at my morning-coat. At any rate, I never neglected any wish of hers in her lifetime. If she'd wished me to go to school again and learn my A, B, C, I would. By — I would; and I wouldn't have gone playing

me, and lounging away my time, for fear of vexing and disappointing her. Yet some folks older than schoolboys" — The squire choked here; but though the words would not come, his passion did not diminish. "I'll not have you casting up your mother's wishes to me, sir. You, who went near to break her heart at last!"

Osborne was strongly tempted to get up and leave the room. Perhaps it would have been better if he had; it might then have brought about an explanation, and a reconciliation between father and son. But he thought he did well in sitting still and appearing to take no notice. This indifference to what he was saying appeared to annoy the squire still more, and he kept on grumbling and talking to himself till Osborne, unable to bear it any longer, said, very quietly, but very bitterly, —

"I am only a cause of irritation to you, and home is no longer home to me, but a place in which I am to be controlled in trifles, and scolded about trifles as if I were a child. Put me in a way of making a living for myself — that much your oldest son has a right to ask of you — I will then leave this house, and you shall be no longer vexed by my dress, or my want of punctuality."

"You make your request pretty much as another son did long ago: 'Give me the portion that falleth to me.' But I don't think what he did with his money is much encouragement for me to" — Then the thought of how little he could give his son his 'portion,' or any part of it, stopped the squire.

Osborne took up the speech.

"I'm as ready as any man to earn my living; only the preparation for any profession will cost money, and money I haven't got."

"No more have I," said the squire, shortly.

"What is to be done, then?" said Osborne, only half believing his father's words.

"Why, you must learn to stop at home, and not take expensive journeys; and you must redeem your tailor's bill. I don't ask you to help me in the management of the land — you're far too fine a gentleman for that; but if you can't earn money, at least you needn't spend it."

"I've told you I'm willing enough to earn money," cried Osborne, passionately at last. "But how am I to do it? You really are very unreasonable, sir."

"Am I?" said the squire — cooling in manner, though not in temper, as Osborne

grew warm. "But I don't set up for being reasonable: men who have to pay away money that they haven't got for their extravagant sons aren't likely to be reasonable. There's two things you've gone and done which put me beside myself, when I think of them: you've turned out next door to a dunce at college, when your poor mother thought so much of you — and when you might have pleased and gratified her so if you chose — and, well! I won't say what the other thing is."

"Tell me, sir," said Osborne, almost breathless with the idea that his father had discovered his secret marriage; but the father was thinking of the money-lenders, who were calculating how soon Osborne would come into the estate.

"No!" said the squire. "I know what I know; and I'm not going to tell you how I know it. Only, I'll just say this — your friends no more know a piece of good timber when they see it than you or I know how you could earn five pounds if it was to keep you from starving. Now, there's Roger — we none of us made an ado about him; but he'll have his fellowship now I'll warrant him, and be a bishop, or a chancellor, or something, before we've found out he's clever — we've been so much taken up thinking about you. I don't know what's come over me to speak of 'we' — 'we' in this way," said he, suddenly dropping his voice, — a change of voice as sad as sad could be. "I ought to say 'I'; it will be 'I' for evermore in this world."

He got up and left the room in quick haste, knocking over his chair, and not stopping to pick it up. Osborne, who was sitting, and shading his eyes with his hand, as he had been doing for some time, looked up at the noise, and then rose as quickly and hurried after his father, only in time to hear the study-door locked on the inside the moment he reached it.

Osborne returned into the dining-room chagrined and sorrowful. But he was always sensitive to any omission of the usual observances, which might excite remark; and even with his heavy heart he was careful to pick up the fallen chair, and restore it to its place near the bottom of the table; and afterwards so to disturb the dishes as to make it appear that they had been touched, before ringing for Robinson. When the latter came in, followed by Thomas, Osborne thought it necessary to say to him that his father was not well, and had gone into the study; and that he himself wanted no dessert, but would have a cup of coffee in the drawing-room. The old

butler sent Thomas out of the room, and came up confidentially to Osborne.

"I thought master wasn't justly himself, Mr. Osborne, before dinner. And therefore I made excuses for him—I did. He spoke to Thomas about the fire, sir, which is a thing I could in nowise put up with, unless by reason of sickness, which I am always ready to make allowances for."

"Why shouldn't my father speak to Thomas?" said Osborne. "But, perhaps, he spoke angrily, I dare say; for I'm sure he's not well."

"No, Mr. Osborne, it wasn't that. I myself am given to anger; and I'm blessed with as good health as any man in my years. Besides, anger's a good thing for Thomas. He needs a deal of it. But it should come from the right quarter—and that is me myself, Mr. Osborne. I know my place, and I know my rights and duties as well as any butler that lives. And it's my duty to scold Thomas, and not master's. Master ought to have said, 'Robinson! you must speak to Thomas about letting out the fire,' and I'd ha' given it him well,—as I shall do now, for that matter. But as I said before, I make excuses for master, as being in mental distress and bodily ill-health; so I've brought myself round not to give warning, as I should ha' done, for certain, under happier circumstances."

"Really, Robinson, I think it's all great nonsense," said Osborne, weary of the long story the butler had told him, and to which he had not half attended. "What in the world does it signify whether my father speaks to you or to Thomas? Bring me coffee in the drawing-room, and don't trouble your head any more about scolding Thomas."

Robinson went away offended at his grievance being called nonsense. He kept muttering to himself in the intervals of scolding Thomas, and saying,—“Things is a deal changed since poor missis went. I don't wonder master feels it, for I'm sure I do. She was a lady who had always a becoming respect for a butler's position, and could have understood how he might be hurt in his mind. She'd never ha' called his delicacies of feelings nonsense—not she; no more would Mr. Roger. He's a merry young gentleman, and over-fond of bringing dirty, slimy creatures into the house; but he's always a kind word for a man who is hurt in his mind. He'd cheer up the squire, and keep him from getting so cross and wilful. I wish Mr. Roger was here, I do.”

The poor squire, shut up with his grief

and his ill-temper as well, in the dingy, dreary study in which he daily spent more and more of his indoor life, turned over his cares and troubles till he was as bewildered with the process as a squirrel must be in going round in a cage. He had out day-books and ledgers, and was calculating up back-rents; and every time the sum-totals came to different amounts. He could have cried like a child over his sums; he was worn out and weary, angry and disappointed. He closed his books at last with a bang.

"I'm getting old," he said, "and my head's less clear than it used to be. I think sorrow for her has dazed me. I never was much to boast on; but she thought a deal of me—bless her! She'd never let me call myself stupid; but, for all that, I am stupid. Osborne ought to help me. He's had money enough spent on his learning; but instead, he comes down dressed like a popinjay, and never troubles his head to think how I'm to pay his debts. I wish I'd told him to earn his living as a dancing-master," said the squire, with a sad smile at his own wit. "He's dressed for all the world like one. And how he's spent the money no one knows! Perhaps Roger will turn up some day with a heap of creditors at his heel. No, he won't—not Roger; he may be slow, but he's steady, is old Roger. I wish he was here. He's not the eldest son, but he'd take an interest in the estate; and he'd do up these weary accounts for me. I wish Roger was here!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### OSBORNE HAMLEY REVIEWS HIS POSITION.

OSBORNE had his solitary cup of coffee in the drawing-room. He was very unhappy, too, after his fashion. He stood on the hearth-rug pondering over his situation. He was not exactly aware how hardly his father was pressed for ready-money; the squire had never spoken to him on the subject without being angry; and many of his loose contradictory statements—all of which, however contradictory they might appear, had their basis in truth—were set down by his son to the exaggeration of passion. But it was uncomfortable enough to a young man of Osborne's age to feel himself continually hampered for want of a five-pound note. The principal supplies for the liberal, almost luxurious, table at the Hall, came off the estate; so that there was no appearance of poverty as far as the household went; and as long as Osborne



was content at home, he had everything he could wish for; but he had a wife elsewhere — he wanted to see her continually — and that necessitated journeys. She, poor thing! had to be supported: where was the money for the journeys and for Aimée's modest wants to come from? That was the puzzle in Osborne's mind just now. While he had been at college, his allowance — heir of the Hamleys — had been three hundred, while Roger had to be content with a hundred less. The payment of these annual sums had given the squire a good deal of trouble; but he thought of it as a merely temporary inconvenience; perhaps unreasonably thought so. Osborne was to do great things; take high honours, get a fellowship, marry a long-descended heiress, live in some of the many uninhabited rooms at the Hall, and help the squire in the management of the estate that would some time be his. Roger was to be a clergyman; steady, slow Roger was just fitted for that, and when he declined entering the Church, preferring a life of more activity and adventure, Roger was to be anything; he was useful and practical, and fit for all the employments from which Osborne was shut out by his fastidiousness, and his (pseudo) genius; so it was well he was an eldest son, for he would never have done to struggle through the world; and as for his settling down to a profession, it would be like cutting blocks with a razor! And now here was Osborne, living at home, but longing to be elsewhere; his allowance stopped in reality; indeed the punctual payment of it during the last year or two had been owing to his mother's exertions; but nothing had been said about its present cessation by either father or son: money matters were too sore a subject between them. Every now and then the squire threw him a ten-pound note or so; but the sort of suppressed growl with which they were given, and the entire uncertainty as to when he might receive them, rendered any calculation based upon their receipt exceedingly vague and uncertain.

"What in the world can I do to secure an income?" thought Osborne, as he stood on the hearth-rug, his back to a blazing fire, his cup of coffee sent up in the rare old china that had belonged to the Hall for generations; his dress finished, as dress of Osborne's could hardly fail to be. One could hardly have thought that this elegant young man, standing there in the midst of comfort that verged on luxury, should have been turning over that one great problem in his mind; but so it was. "What can I do to be sure of a present income? Things cannot go on

as they are. I should need support for two or three years, even if I entered myself at the Temple, or Lincoln's Inn. It would be impossible to live on my pay in the army; besides, I should hate that profession. In fact, there are evils attending all professions — I couldn't bring myself to become a member of any I've ever heard of. Perhaps I'm more fitted to take orders than anything else, but to be compelled to write weekly sermons whether one had anything to say or not, and, probably, doomed only to associate with people below one in refinement and education! Yet poor Aimée must have money. I can't bear to compare our dinners here, overloaded with joints and game and sweets, as Dawson will persist in sending them up, with Aimée's two little mutton-chops. Yet what would my father say if he knew I'd married a Frenchwoman? In his present mood he'd disinherit me, if that is possible; and he'd speak about her in a way I couldn't stand. A Roman Catholic, too! Well, I don't repent it. I'd do it again. Only if my mother had been in good health, if she could have heard my story, and known Aimée! As it is, I must keep it secret; but where to get money? Where to get money?"

Then he bethought him of his poems — would they sell, and bring him in money? In spite of Milton, he thought they might; and he went to fetch his MSS. out of his room. He sat down near the fire, trying to study them with a critical eye, to represent public opinion as far as he could. He had changed his style since the Mrs. Hemans' days. He was essentially imitative in his poetic faculty; and of late he had followed the lead of a popular writer of sonnets. He turned his poems over: they were almost equivalent to an autobiographical passage in his life. Arranging them in their order, they came as follows: —

"To Aimée, Walking with a Little Child."

"To Aimée, Singing at her Work."

"To Aimée, turning away from me while I told my Love."

"Aimée's Confession."

"Aimée in Despair."

"The Foreign Land in which my Aimée dwells."

"The Wedding Ring."

"The Wife."

When he came to this last sonnet he put down his bundle of papers and began to think. "The wife." Yes, and a French wife; and a Roman Catholic wife — and a wife who might be said to have been in service! And his father's hatred of the French, both collectively and individually — collectively,

as tumultuous brutal ruffians, who murdered their king, and committed all kinds of bloody atrocities: individually, as represented by "Boney," and the various caricatures of "Johnny Crapaud" that had been in full circulation about five-and-twenty years before this time — when the squire had been young and capable of receiving impressions. As for the form of religion in which Mrs. Osborne Hamley had been brought up, it is enough to say that Catholic emancipation had begun to be talked about by some politicians, and that the sullen roar of the majority of Englishmen, at the bare idea of it, was surging in the distance with ominous threatenings; the very mention of such a measure before the squire was, as Osborne well knew, like shaking a red flag before a bull.

And then he considered that if Aimée had had the unspeakable, the incomparable blessing of being born of English parents, in the very heart of England — Warwickshire, for instance — and had never heard of priests, or mass, or confession, or the Pope, or Guy Fawkes, but had been born, baptized, and bred in the Church of England, without having ever seen the outside of a dissenting meeting-house, or a papist chapel — even with all these advantages, her having been a (what was the equivalent for "bonne" in English? nursery-governess was a term hardly invented) nursery-maid, with wages paid down once a quarter, liable to be dismissed at a month's warning, and having her tea and sugar doled out to her, would be a shock to his father's old ancestral pride that he would hardly ever get over.

"If he saw her!" thought Osborne. "If he could but see her!" But if the squire were to see Aimée, he would also hear her speak her pretty broken English — precious to her husband, as it was in it that she had confessed brokenly with her English tongue, that she loved him soundly with her French heart — and squire Hamley piqued himself on being a good hater of the French. "She would make such a loving, sweet, docile little daughter to my father — she would go as near as any one could towards filling up the blank void in this house, if he could but have her; but he won't; he never would; and he shan't have the opportunity of scouting her. Yet if I called her 'Lucy' in these sonnets; and if they made a great effect — were praised in *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* — and all the world was agog to find out the author;" and I told him my secret — I could if I were successful — I think then he would ask who Lucy was, and I could tell

him all then. If — how I hate 'ifs,' 'ifs,' 'ifs.' My life has been based on 'whens; and first they have turned to 'ifs,' and then they have vanished away. It was 'when Osborne gets honours,' and then 'if Osborne,' and then a failure altogether. I said to Aimée, 'When my mother sees you,' and now it is 'If my father saw her,' with a very faint prospect of its ever coming to pass." So he let the evening hours flow on and disappear in reveries like these; winding up with a sudden determination to try the fate of his poems with a publisher, with the direct expectation of getting money for them, and an ulterior fancy that, if successful, they might work wonders with his father.

When Roger came home, Osborne did not let a day pass before telling his brother of his plans. He never did conceal anything long from Roger; the feminine part of his character made him always desirous of a confidant, and as sweet sympathy as he could extract. But Roger's opinion had no effect on Osborne's actions; and Roger knew this full well. So when Osborne began with — "I want your advice on a plan I have got in my head," Roger replied: "Some one told me that the Duke of Wellington's maxim was never to give advice unless he could enforce its being carried into effect; now I can't do that; and you know, old boy, you don't follow out my advice when you've got it."

"Not always, I know. Not when it does not agree with my own opinion. You are thinking about this concealment of my marriage; but you're not up in all the circumstances. You know how fully I meant to have done it, if there had not been that row about my debts; and then my mother's illness and death. And now you've no conception how my father is changed — how irritable he has become! Wait till you've been at home a week! Robinson, Morgan — it's the same with them all; but worst of all with me!"

"Poor fellow!" said Roger; "I thought he looked terribly changed; shrunken, and his ruddiness of complexion altered."

"Why, he hardly takes half the exercise he used to do, so it's no wonder. He has turned away all the men off the new works, which used to be such an interest to him; and because the roan cob stumbled with him one day, and nearly threw him, he won't ride it; and yet he won't sell it and buy another, which would be the sensible plan; so there are two old horses eating their heads off, while he is constally talking about money and expense. And that brings

to what I was going to say. I'm desperately hard up for money, and so I've been collecting my poems—weeding them well, you know—going over them quite critically, in fact; and I want to know if you think Deighton would publish them. You've a name in Cambridge, you know; and I dare say he would look at them if you offered them to him."

"I can but try," said Roger; "but I'm afraid you won't get much by them."

"I don't expect much. I'm a new man, and must make my name. I should be content with a hundred. If I'd a hundred pounds I'd set myself to do something. I might keep myself and Aimée by my writings while I studied for the bar; or, if the worst came to the worst, a hundred pounds would take us to Australia."

"Australia! Why, Osborne, what could you do there? And leave my father! I hope you'll never get your hundred pounds, if that's the use you're to make of it! Why, you'd break the squire's heart."

"It might have done once," said Osborne, gloomily, "but it would not now. He looks at me askance, and shies away from conversation with me. Let me alone for noticing and feeling this kind of thing. It's this very susceptibility to outward things that gives me what faculty I have; and it seems to me as if my bread, and my wife's too, were to depend upon it. You'll soon see for yourself the terms which I am on with my father!"

Roger did soon see. His father had slipped into a habit of silence at meal-times—a habit which Osborne, who was troubled and anxious enough for his own part, had not striven to break. Father and son sate together, and exchanged all the necessary speeches connected with the occasion civilly enough; but it was a relief to them when their intercourse was over, and they separated—the father to brood over his sorrow and his disappointment, which were real and deep enough, and the injury he had received from his boy, which was exaggerated in his mind by his ignorance of the actual steps Osborne had taken to raise money. If the money-lenders had calculated the chances of his father's life or death in making their bargain, Osborne himself had thought only of how soon and how easily he could get the money requisite for clearing him from all imperious claims at Cambridge, and for enabling him to follow Aimée to her home in Alsace, and for the subsequent marriage. As yet, Roger had never seen his brother's wife; indeed, he had only been taken into Osborne's full confidence after all was decided in which

his advice could have been useful. And now, in the enforced separation, Osborne's whole thought, both the poetical and practical sides of his mind, ran upon the little wife who was passing her lonely days in farmhouse lodgings, wondering when her bridegroom husband would come to her next. With such an engrossing subject, it was, perhaps, no wonder that he unconsciously neglected his father; but it was none the less sad at the time, and to be regretted in its consequences.

"I may come in and have a pipe with you, sir, mayn't I?" said Roger, that first evening, pushing gently against the study-door, which his father held only half open.

"You'll not like it," said the squire, still holding the door against him, but speaking in a relenting tone. "The tobacco I use isn't what young men like. Better go and have a cigar with Osborne."

"No. I want to sit with you, and I can stand pretty strong tobacco."

Roger pushed in, the resistance slowly giving way before him.

"It will make your clothes smell. You'll have to borrow Osborne's scents to sweeten yourself," said the squire, grimly, at the same time pushing a short smart amber-mouthed pipe to his son.

"No; I'll have a churchwarden. Why, father, do you think I'm a baby to put up with a doll's-head like this?" looking at the carving upon it.

The squire was pleased in his heart, though he did not choose to show it. He only said, "Osborne brought it me when he came back from Germany. That's three years ago." And then for some time they smoked in silence. But the voluntary companionship of his son was very soothing to the squire, though not a word might be said. The next speech he made showed the direction of his thoughts; indeed his words were always a transparent medium through which the current might be seen.

"A deal of a man's life comes and goes in three years—I've found that out." And he puffed away at his pipe again. While Roger was turning over in his mind what answer to make to this truism, the squire again stopped his smoking and spoke.

"I remember when there was all that fuss about the Prince of Wales being made Regent, I read somewhere—I dare say it was in a newspaper—that kings and their heirs-apparent were always on bad terms. Osborne was quite a little chap then: he used to go out riding with me on White Surrey; you won't remember the pony we called White Surrey?"

"I remember it; but I thought it a tall horse in those days."

"Ah! that was because you were such a small lad, you know. I had seven horses in the stable then—not counting the farm-horses. I don't recollect having a care then, except—*she* was always delicate, you know. But what a beautiful boy Osborne was! He was always dressed in black velvet—it was a foppery, but it wasn't my doing, and it was all right, I'm sure. He's a handsome fellow now, but the sunshine has gone out of his face."

"He's a good deal troubled about this money, and the anxiety he has given you," said Roger, rather taking his brother's feelings for granted.

"Not he," said the squire, taking the pipe out of his mouth, and hitting the bowl so sharply against the hob that it broke in pieces. "There! But never mind! I say, not he, Roger! He's none troubled about the money. It's easy getting money from Jews if you're the eldest son, and the heir. They just ask, 'How old is your father, and has he had a stroke, or a fit?' and it's settled out of hand, and then they come prowling about the place and running down the timber and land—Don't let us speak of him; it's no good, Roger. He and I are out of tune, and it seems to me as if only God Almighty could put us to rights. It's thinking of how he grieved her at last that makes me so bitter with him. And yet there's a deal of good in him! and he's so quick and clever, if only he'd give his mind to things. Now, you were always slow, Roger—all your masters used to say so."

Roger laughed a little—

"Yes; I'd many a nickname at school for my slowness," said he.

"Never mind!" said the squire, consolingly. "I'm sure I don't. If you were a clever fellow like Osborne yonder, you'd be all for caring for books and writing, and you'd perhaps find it as dull as he does to keep company with a bumpkin-squire Jones

like me. Yet I dare say they think a deal of you at Cambridge," said he, after a pause, "since you've got this fine wranglership; I'd nearly forgotten that—the news came at such a miserable time."

"Well, yes! They're always proud of the senior wrangler of the year up at Cambridge. Next year I must abdicate."

The squire sat and gazed into the embers, still holding his useless pipe-stem. At last he said, in a low voice, as if scarcely aware he had got a listener,—“I used to write to her when she was away in London, and tell her the home news. But no letter will reach her now! Nothing reaches her!”

Roger started up.

"Where's the tobacco-box, father? Let me fill you another pipe!" and when he had done so, he stooped over his father and stroked his cheek. The squire shook his head.

"You've only just come home, lad. You don't know me, as I am now-a-days! Ask Robinson—I won't have you asking Osborne, he ought to keep it to himself—but any of the servants will tell you I'm not like the same man for getting into passions with them. I used to be reckoned a good master, but that is past now! Osborne was once a little boy, and she was once alive—and I was once a good master—a good master—yes! It is all past now."

He took up his pipe, and began to smoke afresh, and Roger, after a silence of some minutes, began a long story about some Cambridge man's misadventure on the hunting-field, telling it with such humour that the squire was beguiled into hearty laughing. When they rose to go to bed his father said to Roger,—

"Well, we've had a pleasant evening—not at least, I have. But perhaps you have not; for I'm but poor company now, I know."

"I don't know when I've passed a happier evening, father," said Roger. And he spoke truly, though he did not trouble himself to find out the cause of his happiness.